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TRADITION AND BARBARISM

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TRADITION AND BARBARISM

A SURVEY OF ANTI-ROMANTICISM IN FRANCE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this book is to present the French aspect of a new standpoint in criticism. Generalizations, where they occur, are based, as far as possible, upon the published statements of French observers of standing, although no claim of authority is made for any of their positions. Simply to reveal something of what is being thought and said in France, without making an exhaustive attempt to represent the rich diversity of opinion, or attaching equal value to the particular points of view which appear characteristic; to grade and set in order the chief contemporary attitudes and reactions to what is the fundamental critical concern of the day; to select and condense in readable form the outstanding texts and documents comprised in the *dossier* against Romanticism—such is its purpose.

Although I desire to let the facts plead their own cause, it may be excusable, and even of some utility, to introduce the new standpoint briefly in my own terms, leaving it to the

reader to fill in and correct the *résumé* from the citations interspersed through the text, or still better, from the critical writings which will be indicated as the sources of this work. A warning should be given, however, that the better of these methods will not be the less arduous. It would be difficult to discover a volume of recent French criticism in which the author cannot at one time or another be caught surveying the field, when he is not actively engaged on one side or another of the conflict. *Enquêtes*, those premonitory signs of critical upheaval in France, have multiplied of late. The breadth and vigour of discussion point to something of radical concern to the French mind, something of far more importance than a mere quarrel of literary schools. No! a literary conflict, if you will, but one in which literary differences mark a profound spiritual antinomy between two rival conceptions of life and society, government and civilization. A serious affair, it may be, for the nation.

To start clearly with the simplest form of statement before plunging into the ardours of controversy, I risk this somewhat cursory tabulation of the case at issue:

(i) That in the seventeenth century, and to a diminishing degree in the eighteenth, French literature had a special, a distinctive character, which differentiated it from the rest of modern European literatures in a sense other than national.

(ii) That since the middle of the eighteenth century, since Rousseau, French literature has tended to desert this standard and type, returning, with Romanticism, to the main current of general European literature.

(iii) That, in France, Classicism (the type of literature referred to in (i)) has been illustrated by greater genius, both in quality and quantity, than Romanticism. In other words, Classicism has favoured the authentic expression of the French *esprit* better than Romanticism.

(iv) That Romanticism is an error, an aberration of the national taste, symptomatic of a disintegration of the national ideal and of its submergence under an invasion of barbarism.

To prevent a misunderstanding which might arise from this condensation, I must at the outset deny any intention to suggest that French Romanticism lacks qualities that are fundamentally, characteristically and eternally

French. It seems unnecessary to insist, in this country at least, on its special differentia and its own distinction as a separate species. In it we can see the indubitable stamp of the effigy of France upon the common minting metal of the romantic esthetic. To take an example, let us consider the chief butt in the controversy—Victor Hugo. It is now generally agreed (if it were ever seriously doubted) that Hugo's genius was not native to a degree of purity and fineness comparable with Racine's. What is French in Hugo is mixed with an alloy of qualities common to and radically characteristic of an alien literary tradition. In judging him, some would go so far as to affirm (with allowances for the established fact that Hugo was never under the direct influence of a foreign language or literature) that his native genius was to a large degree diluted and contaminated, not by definite contacts, but by methods, ideals and influences which, percolating through from foreign traditions, had saturated the atmosphere in which he lived and worked. There is, none the less, much in him which is, to quote Tennyson, French of the French. One might represent him best perhaps, not as a great Frenchman

spoilt, but as a magnified specimen of a certain common type—the sanguine, abundant, loquacious bourgeois of the nineteenth century—who can yet at moments become something as unbourgeois and as un-French as it is possible to conceive—something between a Teutonic poet-philosopher with intuitions in lieu of thoughts and a seer of old Israel with views instead of vision, manipulating a vocabulary of remarkable imaginative richness, though not after all the rival of Shakespeare's.

Another reservation. We are here to be concerned with a French problem, and mainly with the literary aspect of that problem. Although much has to be related which may bear on the literatures of other countries, I have no desire to make sweeping indictments at the expense of Romanticism in general. Still less is it my wish to be side-tracked by the special problem which many of our contemporaries find presented in English romanticism. I rely on the authority of M. André Gide, who, in reply to an inquiry on the subject, observed that the points at issue would not be comprehensible anywhere else but in France, *la patrie et le dernier refuge du classicisme*. What makes the situation there par-

ticularly interesting is that it is, or purports to be, a reaction in favour of the Tradition. In England, it seems true to say with Mr. Middleton Murry, that Romanticism *is* the Tradition, provided of course the first term is given a sufficiently broad connotation. But this is to stray rashly into the thick of a 'foreign' debate. Let us content ourselves with the particular situation presented in the following terms by the late Paul Souday, who, if not the least prejudiced of critics, was certainly no enemy of Romanticism: '*Non moins que d'une crise du français . . . nous souffrons d'une crise de la pensée.*'

I

TRADITION AND BARBARISM

I

CERTAIN great controversies seem never to die. They may cease to occupy attention for decades, for centuries. They may appear to be laid finally to rest in the triumph of one side over another. But the history of critical thought shows that the buried monster may unexpectedly raise its head, disguised in a new fashion, yet with its original lineaments unequivocally resurgent. The historic Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns appeared effectively settled when, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, Romanticism routed Classicism from the French stage. To-day the majority of French critics would persuade us that Romanticism is dead. And certainly the very effort made to *define* Romanticism is symptomatic: it has something of the anxiety of a diagnosis, when it does not suggest the desperate resignation of a post mortem.

Definitions have been precipitously frequent of late. For the year 1927 witnessed the celebration of the Centenary of Romanticism in France. Perhaps instead of 'celebration' I should have used a colourless term like observance or a more definite one like obsequies. Because what 'rejoicings' there have been, certainly owed less to motives of personal enthusiasm or public thanksgiving than to a sense of perfunctory respect or to an impulse of official constraint. One hundred years have elapsed since . . . what? The fervent few faithfully observing the hundredth revolution, have been not a little embarrassed by importunate queries from the ironical profane as to why a year ending in '27 should have been preferred to a '30 or even to a '26. And what of a '20 or a '24? Each year of the decade in question might have claims to be the birthday of Romanticism in France, which according to the learned M. Mornet was struggling for parturition before Rousseau began to write and had certainly been weaned by 1750. In the preface to a recent volume, *Des Romantiques à Nous*, M. Pierre Lasserre discusses some of the difficulties connected with attaching the notion of a Centenary to

a general movement of ideas like Romanticism which he admits might equally well be said to begin with Chateaubriand as with Rousseau, and which in any case is no more French than English or German, and certainly less French than European. The attitude of the contemporary French mind towards this matter is, to say the least, divided, as is also its allegiance to the Romantics themselves. Academics are for the most part favourable. A chair to commemorate Victor Hugo, whose statue, with one of Pasteur, commands the *cour* of the Sorbonne, was inaugurated recently, and the weekly lectures of M. le Breton, its first titular holder, filled a heated amphitheatre mercilessly full. Generally, professors and teachers are more inclined to be 'fair' to Romanticism than any other class of the intelligentsia—it may be, quite honourably, a little as guardians of a régime which has become identified with that literary banner and which at present is exposed to such redoubtable attacks from quarters where all that is Romantic is anathema, and where almost all that is, is Romantic.

Outside the Academies, representative minds are detached from this guardian attitude but divided among themselves in curious fashion.

The foremost critics are for the most part antipathetic, when they are not definitely antagonistic. The most advanced artists have pushed the idiosyncrasies of Romanticism so far that they can airily deny all possibilities of indebtedness or descent. Indeed, one of the most characteristic features of the development of nineteenth-century literature has been the heartiness of the revolt made by each successive generation of artists against what they have supposed to be Romantic. It must be admitted, though, that such revolt has never been consciously or completely 'anti-romantic', in the sense the term has to-day. An exception may be made for the *École romane*, the beginning of that Neo-classicism which is one of the nuclei of the present attitude. But apart from Jean Moréas' deliberate return to earlier traditions, recent movements have been so many feverish struggles, mainly motivated by the desire to get away from anything achieved within the last decade. This is not the mood to produce a classical revival, and no one claims that Classicism has come actively to life again. All that has happened is that classical standards are again becoming the vital measurements, and classical ideals reappearing

as the inspiring objectives of the best critical thought in France. Mere critical changes unproductive of creative consequences are a species of faith without works. But if contemporary preparations should lead to definite accomplishment, it would not be the first time that artistic effect had followed critical cause in a land where serious movements may actually ensue upon manifestos. With the present situation in mind, Maurras has said: '*Les grands mouvements littéraires ont commencé par des vues théoriques et critiques.*'

II

The study of an extensive stretch of French literature usually gives the impression that the history of letters in France is marked by a succession of groups or 'schools' which dominate, with their programmes and ideals, periods of time whose length depends either upon the force of genius concentrated in individual members of the group or upon the value or popularity of its collective contribution. There appears to be ample justification for adopting such a view in considering the past: it is almost imposed upon the student of the nineteenth century. But of the present moment, one is

prompted to inquire whether it may not be unique in its lack of creative domination, or whether most of the tabulated periods gone by did not present just as baffling and indeterminate an appearance to the contemporary inquirer, in search of orientation or tendency among the conflicting phenomena of his day. Those former schools, as they appear to us now, perhaps simplified by distance, were composed of groups of satellites, more or less clearly differentiated, revolving around the effulgence of the *Maître*. Of masters, there is still no shortage in France, but they seem to lack the old facility for attracting and retaining, close to their persons, an obeisant *entourage*. The greatest of all recent *maîtres*, the surest perhaps to become an old master, has passed away, leaving a scattered universe of mourners, but no sect or body of disciples to perpetuate the doctrine or maintain the cult. Cult, doctrine, disciples, the words themselves are incompatible with the name of Anatole France. Another contemporary master, M. André Gide, is admitted, even by his critics, to have exerted an important influence on the literary conscience of the last few decades. But the group of the *Nouvelle Revue*

française which he helped to found, he has for some years ceased to direct. Nor has the review itself ever had that definiteness of programme, that stamp of homogeneous co-operation, which characterized the *Mercure de France* in the heyday of Symbolism. M. Jules Romains writes still better plays, novels and poems, inspired (though in a modified degree) by his idea of *Unanimisme*. But where are the Unanimists of L'Abbaye? For specimens of the Neo-catholic in literature one may turn to Charles Péguy or to M. Paul Claudel, without finding a link between them, save the fervour of converts for the Church of Rome.

Some of these men might exclusively have dominated the last few decades, but for a curious difference between them and the masters of the past. Whereas the latter represented, with a certain unifying generality, the literary temperament of their age, a France, a Barrès, a Gide, a Claudel have presented their generation with an *embarras du choix* among divergent, conflicting and often diametrically opposed ideals. Individually they appear to have been indifferent to the honour of occupying the place vacated by Mallarmé or Taine or Leconte de Lisle.

In one direction only is it possible to find any broad conformity of tendency and opinion. But for this we must turn from poets and novelists to critics and men of letters. The critical opinion of the present is the reverse of unanimous, but some important sections of it participate in the same general movement of intellectual reaction that has characterized much of the best thought in France since, and some time before, the War. Concerned chiefly with the literary aspect of that reaction, I may define its function and object as a Criticism of Romanticism, reminding the reader that so far as the general movement goes, Romanticism is used, in the broadest sense of the term, as the representative expression of nineteenth-century civilization. Our 'romantic' civilization is the common object of the assault; but a great diversity of methods and objectives divides the attacking forces. The leading spirit in the movement, the keen and resolute Charles Maurras, is an intransigent nationalist, desperately persuaded, in a time of governmental instability and (as he thinks) of national effacement, of the saving graces of royalism and catholicism. He longs to reinstate a thoroughgoing Classicism in politics

as well as in literature. Poles asunder, M. André Gide gently plumes himself on being the one surviving classical writer. Severe on bygone idols like Flaubert and Gautier, he objects to the narrowness of Maurras, who decries him in turn for dalliance with the vague gods of Protestantism and Barbarism. M. Henri Massis is still more hostile, and discovers the Evil One himself suavely disguised in the subversive author of *L'Immoraliste*, whose classicism, he says, is but a supreme feint masking the revolt of his soul, where the assembled demons dispute. But then, M. Massis is hard to please, being none too considerate of that non-monarchical patriot, the late Maurice Barrès, and quite curt at the expense of Anatole France, whom Maurras still adores as the last writer of French—until the end, a potential, even when so recalcitrant, royalist! Yet when Maurras would salute the master with a wise tribute in one column of his nationalist journal, he is forestalled in another by his robust, expostulating and vituperative colleague, M. Léon Daudet, who dismisses the late 'pseudo-sceptic' as a mere *hésitant*, relegating him, with *his* master, Renan, to a limbo where they continue to play with

fire at a risk confined to scorching their finger-tips. Hereupon appears the combative, concentrated figure of M. Pierre Lasserre, one of the original Defenders of the Faith, whose attack on *Le Romantisme français* scandalized and confounded his liberal examiners at the Sorbonne, twenty years ago, perceiving—in opposition to Daudet—a 'message' for us in Renan, but 'agreeing' (the word is used in the most cautious and tentative sense) with that other fine critic, M. Julien Benda, of *Belphégor* fame, on the responsibility of Renan's teachers, the Germans, for much of the defective thinking of the nineteenth century. Finally—if it be permitted to curtail the list so soon!—observe M. le baron Ernest Seillière diagnosing as the stigma of Romanticism a modern variety of natural religion, in which God is supplanted by an imaginary Accomplice who aids and abets the assertion of a hypertrophied Will to Power (*l'Impérialisme mystique*), and suffering chastisement from the spiritual hands of M. Jacques Maritain, the neo-thomist and anti-modernist, for bringing the term mysticism into a controversy by which its real significance is distorted and debased.

Nor reigns more blissful concord between

the radical antagonists of these uncertain allies. Two picturesque figures have until recently led the hosts of the Pro-romantics—that supple and delicious Meridional, M. Henri Bremond, and the gruff and positive Norman, Paul Souday. Now up to the latter's death in 1929, M. Bremond and M. Souday were perpetually and magnificently at loggerheads. There is no Anti-romantic whom Paul Souday so vengefully pursued as the *fameux et fluidique Abbé*. Nor did the rapier thrusts of that imperturbable, but by no means pacifistic, Academician find more constant and elegant employ than in turning the guard and pricking the doublet of the redoubtable censor of the *Temps*. But we must not be lured on to the 'wrong' side of the controversy by the temptation to dally over a private duel, which has alas! become a reminiscence.

All these writers, says M. Jacques Boulenger of the Anti-romantics, work apart, as if separated by thick walls, affecting to ignore, even to disdain, one another. They nevertheless agree upon the intellectual and moral characteristics of Romanticism regarded from the standpoint of the philosophy of history; and so far as literature is concerned, there is also con-

siderable agreement, or at least coincidence, in their hopes and aspirations. What these are may best be stated in the words Maurras used in an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre:

'In what concerns ideas and taste, we are on the high road to a classical renaissance. Our only wish now is for the advent of a great poet, capable of appropriating material worthy of him, able to assimilate it, fuse it together, and thus give his work that general, that human value which will impose it upon posterity. . . . A century and a quarter of revolutions, aggravated by partisan government, has made France a country of divisions, of compartments, where for want of a unifying centre, the "*Chapelles littéraires*" as Pierre Lasserre calls them, are the rule, and where agreement about the great moral issues has gradually become the exception. I hoped that benefit would accrue from the evils of the War. I expected a sort of moral unanimity around the memory of our heroic dead. But the party spirit spares nothing . . . Language requires a certain degree of unity of conscience, a much greater degree is required for poetry.'

Here Maurras' political attitude emerges in

its incidence upon his critical standpoint. In M. Roger Martin du Gard's interesting work, *Jean Barois*, there is a dramatic presentation of this link, generalized to represent the point of view, not of an individual, however important, but of the youth of contemporary France. I translate freely from an interview between two members of the younger generation and one of their elders, Barois himself. Having announced that France is prey to a veritable anarchy (*Anarchie raisonnée, sans éclats, mais généralisée et proprement destructive*), resulting from the loss of religious beliefs and standards of appreciation, the young spokesmen continue:

'GRENNEVILLE: The nineteenth century as a whole, from the Declaration of '89 to Jaurès, passing through Lamartine and Gambetta, is poisoned by this romanticism: from beginning to end, the same verbiage, picturesque perhaps, but devoid of direction and thought . . .

'TILLET: Or rather, swollen with generous thought, but without the least comprehension of the real. No logic: simply "hot air". No relation between words and social truth.

'BAROIS (*on the defence*): Don't you think

that words, whatever they are, become mechanically impoverished in meaning after being tossed about at the cross-roads for a century?

'GRENNEVILLE: The terms themselves may go out of fashion, but the strong realities they express, will last. "Nationalism", "Classicism", are not vague formulæ; they are clear thoughts, they are even the clearest and richest thoughts of our civilization!

'TILLET: Misunderstanding arises perhaps from this, that we employ the word *thought* in an acceptation different from yours. For us, all thought that is not conciliated with the life of action to the point of becoming merged in it, is not thought: it is nothing, it doesn't exist. You can, I agree, say that thought must direct life, but it is *life* that must give birth to this directing thought, *life* that must nourish and rule it.

'GRENNEVILLE: (*to* BAROIS): Your generation, contrary to ours, was satisfied with abstract theories which not only did not foster the desire to act, but contributed to sterilize it. This mandarin's game, which ended in complete inactivity, is repugnant to-day to the new France, the France of the German menace, the France of Agadir . . .'

Jean Barois' young critics would not agree even to the half concession which Mr. T. S. Eliot makes in *The Sacred Wood*: 'There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters.'

II

LEADERS IN THE ATTACK

I

Two swift and shattering decades have passed since the civilized composure of the Sorbonne Faculty of Arts was startled by the presentation of a thesis which routed the sympathies of its academic judges, and was only saved from indignant rejection by the eleventh-hour intervention of Émile Faguet. In it, all the idols and ideals of Romanticism and the Republic, all the standards and achievements, the promises and hopes of nineteenth-century ideology were outraged, discredited and pilloried with an asperity that would have appeared insolent, had it been less earnest in tone, less deliberate in method. The Revolutionary tradition, with which the University of Paris had naturally, like other national institutions, become identified, was stigmatized as a mirage of unreason, and the true, rational and reasonable Tradition declared to be the one

it had supplanted at the end of the eighteenth century.

The Sorbonne was exasperated. But the public, when the doctor's thesis appeared as a book in 1907, gave it a more favourable reception; and in his preface to the edition of 1919, the author could claim that the War had confirmed and justified its general intention, and that, since the Academic counterblast, it had received no reasoned refutation, or even provoked one of those outcries of emotional protest which are so difficult for a scholar and critic to oppose—proof probable, if not positive, that the sources of Romantic eloquence have dried up!

The writer, M. Pierre Lasserre, defined his position and resumed the basis of his elaborate attack in the preface to the eighth edition. For him, Romanticism is not a particular school or phase of nineteenth-century literature, not even the name applicable to French literature since Rousseau. More general, more radical than that, it is a 'certain essential disposition of the human soul resulting from a profound and far-reaching revolution in ideas and feelings of all kinds, moral, political, religious and metaphysical, as well as æsthetic.'

For, as he says with point, in his country theoretic revolutions are always impatient to become revolutions in the political and moral sense. It is significant that, in the *Romantisme français*, we do not read of 'neo-classicism' or of 'anti-romanticism', but always of Counter-revolution.

This disposition M. Lasserre regards as a malady, a disease of the human soul. Romanticism is the decomposition of art, because it is the decomposition of man. His criterion of health is that implied in Aristotle's refusal of the character of humanity to whatever is vague, confused and uncontrolled in the conscience of the individual. And he insists, with the generality of classical philosophers, upon a hierarchy in the psychical faculties, an order based on the subordination of sensibility to intelligence, of imagination to reason, of the affective to the reflective faculties. Romanticism is just the reverse—a 'revolution in the economy of civilized human nature,' an 'enthusiastic disorganization of human nature,' 'the most subversive torrent of ideas and sentiments that was ever let loose on mankind.' It is destruction mistaking itself for creation, regression for progress, servitude for free-

dom. It is the ruin of the individual through exclusive concentration on the claims of a primitive, spontaneous and fictitious self, isolated from society and tradition which alone give value to the individual: '*un parti d'individualisme absolu dans la pensée et les sentiments*'.

The writer is fully aware of his doctrinaire attitude. His experience is that of all thinkers fundamentally concerned with matters of taste. But he is not content with a merely negative *De gustibus*. . . . His trenchant personality and distinctive standpoint went into the phrase: 'When a certain kind of false and barbarous taste flourishes, the best one can do is to inoculate its roots with a deadly poison and leave the rest to time.'

II

M. Lasserre's *Romantisme français* is the first 'text-book' of anti-romantic criticism. But the critical standpoint to which it conforms owes its contemporary formulation mainly to M. Charles Maurras, whose name need not be too exclusively associated with nationalist propaganda and royalist party politics. The movement he leads, the political reaction against the effects of the Revolution, began in

an early revulsion from literary Romanticism. This attitude and its origins are explained in the volume called *Quand les Français ne s'Aimaient pas*, wherein is exposed that 'national self-denial in favour of external traditions' which Maurras finds characteristic of nineteenth-century France. He tells how, as early as 1890–1, he and his companions had come to regard democracy as an abominable topsy-turvy, equally shocking to good sense, reason, and the interests of individuals and nations. 'Romanticism seemed to us a great error; the Revolution a profound stupidity.' But it is in the *Avenir de l'Intelligence*, his central work, that this standpoint is given full and mature expression. Fundamental is the belief in the superiority of French civilization:

'Universal history shows no intellectual and moral treasure that can be compared with the *ensemble* of acquired facts and applied forces represented by the civilization of France. The vast accumulation of memories, the infinite number of lessons in reason and taste, the essence of politeness incorporated in the language, the widespread feeling for the most delicate perfections—of all this custom has

made us almost as unconscious as we are of the air in which our bodies move and breathe . . .'

These treasures of taste and manners are ascribed to the classical tradition. Romanticism has effected a break in its continuity, due to the foreign origin of the Romantic masters and their ideas. Maurras recalls the facts that the *Nouvelle Héloïse* was written by a Swiss, *De l'Allemagne* by a woman who shared that nationality with a Prussian origin, while the author of *Lélia* could count Germans and Slavs among her direct antecedents. The lack of discipline characteristic of the young *métèques* simply perpetuates a tradition which, for all its introduction into France, has yet remained distinct from the true literature of the country. We must *feel* the heterogeneity of George Sand, of Mme. de Staël, of Rousseau, before we have a right to censure their heirs, who form but a wave—the latest—of that Gothic invasion which poured in through the gap of Geneva and Coppet.

'Since the last third of the Middle Ages' he continues 'France has been the bulwark of the classical spirit; as it yields, the cause fails in Europe. The predilection of the Emperor

Julian, that worshipper of the ancient gods, seems to have designated Paris as the direct heir of the classical world. No country in Europe ever gave lessons in taste to the modern Attic. The whole of Europe is barbarian in comparison; but since French influence has been on the wane and has proceeded from a less pure inspiration, the barbarism of the world at large has no alternative but to increase.'

The standard adopted in judging the personalities of Romanticism is that set by the classic types of the Ile de France, in which restricted area Maurras finds the birthplace and cradle of the distinctive French genius. The touchstone for production is, of course, the literature of the seventeenth century. From this standpoint, Rousseau and Mme. de Staël at once become aliens, Chateaubriand and Hugo fall outside the tradition, whilst the later ranks of the nineteenth century are ignored as a more or less wholesale capitulation to the vapid or raving *métèque*.

To consider Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo as not thoroughly French might seem like special pleading. The splendid propriety and

orderliness of Chateaubriand's style are undeniably characters of the best tradition. But as Sainte-Beuve had complained, his language has other elements, less praiseworthy, even suspicious. The quality of his imagination is Celtic, not Latin, and his love of seafaring and adventure specialize him as typical of the Armorican branch of the Celtic remnant. In these features he is no more 'French' than his compatriot Pierre Loti, whose work reveals the same ethnical *Wanderlust* and exotism. '*Après tout*' said Sainte-Beuve '*c'est un Breton qui se distingue, par quelques traits originels, reconnaissables, du Français proprement dit.*'

If the source is impure, what of the stream? M. Victor Giraud has said that the whole of Romanticism is in Chateaubriand. And this is only the last authoritative pronouncement of a verdict which has been repeated since Gautier called him the Sachem of Romanticism in France.

Hugo too was of 'alien' stock through his mother—'*d'un sang breton et lorrain à la fois*'. In him there develops a more Teutonic type of genius. His poetic ideal of the *Songeur, le penseur flottant*, inconclusively preoccupied with the Beyond, the Unknowable, the In-

finite, is a trump in the hands of his present-day critics.

'*Que ces Allemands m'embêtent avec leur infini!*' is an ejaculation typical of Maurras. And Lasserre asserts that there is not one form of German pantheism which does not reappear in the improvizations of the poet. '*S'il y a tant de Germanie dans Hugo*' he adds '*on peut se demander où dans le siècle on n'en trouverait pas.*'

The mentality and production of such men as Hugo and Chateaubriand fill Maurras with irritation and contempt. He makes them mainly responsible for a deplorable deterioration in the ideals and models of nineteenth-century literature, which he analyses thus:

'For a century and a half, French literature has suffered great losses on the intellectual side. Racine has been said to have *thought* even his feelings. The Romantics have materialized and, if I may say so, sensualized, thought itself. With Chateaubriand, Hugo and the rest, words have acquired a carnal flavour (*un goût de chair*); constantly, wilfully, systematically, prose-writers and poets have applied themselves to giving all sorts of

physical graces to the elements of their language, thereby sacrificing force of meaning, energy of style, general beauty of composition and even that balanced splendour which, proceeding from the intimate qualities of a fine work, endows it with immortality.'

Here, in a personal form, crops out the favourite objection to Romanticism, its overstress of emotion and sensibility, its sensationalism, its 'sensuality'. 'It is hard' wrote Stendhal in 1817 'not to see what the nineteenth-century desires. A love of strong emotions is its true character.' This had come down from Rousseau, of whom Hume wrote that he had only *felt* during the whole course of his life. Worse still, the type of feeling enshrined in the Romantic ideal is not the feeling of humanity at large—that would be far too commonplace!—but individual feeling in its most eccentric and esoteric distinctness. 'At bottom' says Maurras 'Romanticism is emotional anarchy.' This point is developed at length.

'The revolt of the individual, once accepted under the name of originality as the artistic principle, has determined a type of anarchy

much more profound. Submission to the guidance of sentiment and to the rule of sensation, along with the adoption of eccentric tendencies by the imagination, have become so much a part of Romantic practice that the words *romanesque* and *romantique* are accepted as synonymous. Yet the things they stand for are different. There are romantically-minded people who smile at their own romance, but who are careful nevertheless not to deceive themselves about the value of what they are doing . . . Romantic sensibility is something quite different. Its character is to believe and proclaim itself the rule of all things. Quite definitely, Romanticism comes into being at the point where sensibility usurps the function to which it is a stranger, and not content with feeling and furnishing the soul with the warmth of life it requires, busies itself with imparting its own direction . . . The thinkers who are led to profess this system believe or make believe that there exists at bottom of each private sensibility, a powerful principle of unity and order. Thus in their own persons they become the judges of their destiny, and erect their private traits into a model of philosophy. This is what Rous-

seau insinuates at the beginning of his *Concessions: "Moi seul. Je sais mon cœur et je fonnais les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus . . . J'ai dit le bien, le mal avec la même franchise."* This tone of authority which consecrates Good and Evil as equally divine emanations of the Self inaugurates the morale of Romanticism. Be good or bad, but be candidly yourself. Sincerity of the personality, all is there!'

Maurras finds the cause and explanation of Romantic melancholy in that the inner life is dominated by Sentiment. This leads to the culminating point of his criticism. For him the moral influence of Romanticism is not adequately described by the popular terms decadence and degeneration. Instead of saying that Romanticism has caused the mind and soul of France to degenerate, would it not be better, he asks, to realize that it has made them *effeminate*? He concludes his argument with this provocative distinction:

'Woman's tendency is to exaggerate what she is, much more than to correct and embellish it. She discovered, from the beginning, the æsthetic of Character, to which was

opposed later that æsthetic of Harmony which the Greeks invented and brought to perfection, by the fact that male intelligence was dominant amongst them. The Greeks made the general and rational sense of the beautiful the principle of their whole civilization, which has been prolonged by Rome and Paris. Other peoples, East and West, that is all the Barbarians, have kept to the principle of Character, as revealed by feminine sentiment.'

Further definition of Maurras' ideas on Tradition and Barbarism will be found in the recent re-edition of the *Prologue d'un Essai sur la Critique* (1896). This admirable exposition of the best in his thought is, I venture to think, the finest reassertion since Buffon of the classical standpoint in criticism. It would be inexcusable to attempt to resume an essay of less than a score of pages in which every word counts. Those interested should follow in the original the development of an argument which declares that there is one supreme tradition—that which originated in Ionia and has crossed the centuries to be conserved in Paris; that this tradition is essential and natural to France, and that the 'notion

of Barbarism' applies to what is foreign to it, external not only to the common treasure of Græco-latin culture but also to the highest realizations of the human spirit.

Closely associated with the recent activities of Charles Maurras, M. Léon Daudet has not been slow to share in the assault on what he calls the *Stupide Dix-Neuvième Siècle*. His view regards the common object of loathing from a psychological angle and emphasizes yet another feature of its deplorable character. Lacking the originality and sweep of Maurras' line of attack, it appears to be aimed in particular at Hugo's notion of the opposition of the agreeable and the grotesque, worked out in an art characterized by excess. M. Daudet defines Romanticism as an extravagance at once mental and verbal, which confuses the notions of the beautiful and the ugly by submitting æsthetics to the law of size and to startling effects derived from contrast and antithesis. Its chief characteristic, he says, is the *démesuré*, for in the first place it puts everything in the superlative and neglects all that is not excessive in whatever category or *genre*. In the second, it gives predominance to feeling over thought,

to sensation over sentiment, to verbal and syntactical expression over both feeling and sensation. It thus institutes a false Sublimity, by which the crowd allows itself to be caught and which confuses public taste.

The character of Romanticism, he adds, does not consist in a certain intermittent or chronic impetuosity of language. It consists in the discord between poor thinking and rich expression, and in a debility of the judgment which makes now pity, now anger, disgust or melancholy, the frenzied rule of style and of the universe. It is obvious that such a lack of equilibrium leads rapidly to insincerity, since whoever constantly wishes to move others, without being moved himself, must make a comedy of sensibility or of sensuality. In fact, Romanticism, in literature as in politics, is the school of falsehood and hypocrisy. There is no greater Tartuffe than Victor Hugo. One could guess it from his work without knowing anything of his biography.

III

It is obvious that the historical argument counts for much with the critics of Roman-

ticism—though their sense of history may well seem to be deficient in objectivity. The Anti-romantics are all systematizers; and the tendency to systematize history itself is carried almost to the verge of sophistication in a recently published book, where the question of origins is treated in a manner which essays to be thorough and systematic, and is certainly the latter to the point of sacrificing much erudition, pertinent commentary and finality of judgment to the contemporary Juggernaut of special pleading. In the last resort, the thesis maintained in M. Louis Reynaud's *Romantisme: les Origines Anglo-Germaniques*, implies the conclusion that England is ultimately responsible for the materialistic type of thought and literature which has produced in France the follies and excesses of Romanticism. It is quite disturbing to think of those moralizing censors of France who still abound in this country being confronted with dogmatic assertions of the contamination of French thought and letters through contact with our own salubrious and incorruptible literature! The book represents, dramatically enough, the stages in the history of the pressure exerted by English thought

and literature first in undermining the old traditions, then in capturing the sources of energy and finally in overwhelming all resistance. The main steps by which the author arrives at his drastic conclusions may be set out thus:

(i) That the character of a nation's literature is the outcome of its social and mental life. The literature, like the art and politics of a nation, is but the expression of the fundamental ideas of an epoch. Once these ideas are replaced by others, the national literature will translate this change in its own way. That is why French literature gradually perished *from within* during the eighteenth century. The literature of the seventeenth century had been Christian and monarchist; it could not thrive in a period definitely antichristian and antimonarchist. It was the literature of the mind, and bound to perish in a period which gave the first place to something else: nature, matter, the senses, instincts, passions, sensibility, imagination.

(ii) That an abyss separates the genius of traditional French literature from that of the Teutonic literatures. On one side, 'nature',

the obscure life of sensibility and instinct, the brilliance of the imagination, the delight in the contact with reality, the energetic affirmation of the individual. On the other, reason, clear and absolute, human and not individual, scorn for all that emanates from the troubled depths of sentimentality, indifference to the realism of everyday life, with the desire to ennoble and magnify both reality and man.

(iii) French Romanticism, despite its religious and somewhat catholic exterior, is a *materialistic movement*, just like the movement towards nature-worship which had preceded it in the eighteenth century and out of which it came. This, of course, was of English origin. (*Notre XVIIIe siècle a une philosophie anglaise*). In other words Romanticism is essentially a phenomenon of Anglo-germanic influence in French literary history.

This contention of the *spirituality* of French Classicism as opposed to the *materialism* of the Northern influences which undermined and supplanted it, is essential to M. Reynaud's thesis and recurs like a refrain through his book. I leave in the capable hands of M.

Lasserre, who gave the book an otherwise favourable review, the protest against this emphatic use of the vague term *spiritualiste*, applied with the regularity of a Homeric epithet to the literature of the seventeenth century. Another point is of more pertinent interest. I cannot help agreeing with M. Edmond Jaloux who, in an admirable critique, accused the author of setting down, as absolute and indisputable verities, observations which should be presented with infinite *nuance* and reserve. That the word *influence*, the most important term in the whole work, should never have been defined; that it should appear to be employed with meanings that range from mere priority to plagiarism, is, I venture to think, a criticism that may legitimately be levelled not only against M. Reynaud's method, but against much in the practice of 'scientific' research, of which it is a signal example. So much of what may be—for all the *proofs* that are given—mere formal or fortuitous resemblance appears to be accepted as having been directly and definitely *influenced*, without any sensitiveness being shown to the deep and subtle psychological problem that must underlie any assumption of real literary indebtedness.

Is there not a certain irony in the fact that this the finished method of a celebrated *Faculté des Lettres* should have been put so ruthlessly at the service of a hostile cause?[1]

IV

Explanations amounting to a four-fold apology might seem necessary for introducing M. Julien Benda in the train of Maurras, Daudet and Pierre Lasserre. M. Benda takes no side in the controversy between neo-classics and the defenders of Romanticism. His position has been aptly described, in the study which M. Constant Bourquin has devoted to him, as the Standpoint of Sirius. He is so far removed from contending parties on earth that the confusion of oppositions resolve themselves into one: that between the celestially dis-

[1] I have no desire to close this brief account of M. Reynaud's interesting work on an ungenerous note. If it is difficult to accept many of his conclusions without more precise and convincing proof of their validity, I am not without admiration for the way a startling thesis has been presented with the help of what is assuredly a vast and detailed knowledge of foreign literatures—an *extent* of knowledge unusual with Frenchmen, which may even justify the claim the author seems anxious to make of superiority over the rest of workers in the field of comparative literature.

tant critic and the rest of the universe upon which he looks down. A mind that can survey from the same altitude of disdain a pair of human antinomies like Charles Maurras and Romain Rolland cannot be ranked among warring forces that contend in an atmosphere lower and murkier than that of Olympus.

We are warned at the commencement of *Belphégor* that this now famous essay on the æsthetic standards and tastes of contemporary French society was almost completed before the War. It appeared in 1918. This removes it in time, as it is removed in kind, from the considerations with which we are specifically concerned. Post-war problems and developments naturally find no place among its references and objectives. M. Benda's line of criticism aims at something more sweeping, more radical than any of the attacks on Romanticism. But it frequently turns out to be almost identical with the line taken by the anti-romantic critics; while the points on which it differs constitute a salutary criticism of the excesses of a too militant attitude.

The most frequent and characteristic incidence of this essay on recent thought lies in a sphere where the ramifications of 'romantic'

thinking have strayed beyond the bounds of pure literature. Julien Benda is one of the most tenacious adversaries of the philosophy of Henri Bergson.[1] The first part of *Belphégor*, where the author studies an æsthetic trait of the contemporary public, under the rubric, *Volonté que l'art soit une union mystique avec l'essence des choses*, is significant enough. But throughout are formulated definite protests against Bergson's conception of the artistic function and the type of æsthetic theory it has fostered. Characteristic is the opposition to M. Tancrède de Visan's *Attitude du Lyrisme contemporain*, which attempts to co-ordinate Symbolism and Bergsonism, and is still one of the best introductions to the recent poetic school.

Charles Péguy once said that M. Benda was the only anti-Bergsonian who knew what he was talking about. The grounds for his reaction are well summarized in this comment of another critic of Bergson, M. Jules de Gaulthier, who, in introducing M. Bourquin's

[1] Cf. earlier works like *Le Bergsonisme, ou une philosophie de la mobilité* and *Le succès du Bergsonisme, précédé d'une réponse sur les défenseurs de la doctrine*; also the more recent *Lettres à Mélisande*.

study, says: 'Like myself, M. Benda founds his chief reproach against the philosophy of M. Bergson on the fact that the latter has attempted to transcend intellectual knowledge, and the conditions of relation, in order to attain the absolute through an intuition belonging to the order of sensation.' Furthermore, Bergsonism, according to M. Benda, has played into the hands of society by providing just the sort of intellectual aliment it required—a type of philosophical speculation that furnishes an experience for the senses or emotions rather than for the mind.

Before considering the work in further detail, a word might be said as to its method. M. Benda's object (stated clearly enough to leave no excuse for the critics who have mistaken it) is not to discuss the doctrines of his contemporaries, but to mark the underlying impulses and desires (*volontés*) which they express. His manner is a little dry and ironical, but telling and pointed to a fine degree; and the book, slight enough in appearance, is a dense mine of pungent observations and pertinent citations, the latter drawn for the most part from writers of the classical centuries, the former culled in that milieu of

society itself which was the hunting-ground of the classical observers. Five-o'clock tea talk, after-dinner conversations, the favourite reviews and journals of the *beau monde*, and, above all, the works of those authors who most faithfully represent public taste, are the sources from which M. Benda has composed his *dossier* of incriminating documents upon the æsthetic tendencies of contemporary society.

The first and chief, indeed the constant objects of attack are the more recent consequences of the historic substitution, dating from Rousseau and the Romanticists, of an emotional type of art for an intellectual one. It is against this 'wholly affective' conception of art, popular with his contemporaries, that M. Benda revolts; and he marks as one of the most curious traits of the society around him, its hatred of intelligence. In still clearer tones he resumes his main position thus:

'Present-day society in France demands that works of art should provide emotional and sensational experiences; it is assumed that no kind of intellectual pleasure is to be asked of them.'

This desire to experience emotions through

the work of art is not of course judged a new thing in a country where society has always been directed by women. But what belongs specially to our time is the extraordinary perfection of this desire, its precision and violence, the application, the science that it devotes to satisfying itself and extending its field, its universality, its prevalence among people who are considered the most cultivated and, above all, the fact that it has become fully conscious—something to be proud of, something to systematize.

M. Benda is never more in line with the critics of Romanticism than when he censures the invasion by lyricism, not only of the other kinds of literary expression, but also of history, science and philosophy. He deplores the facilities of impressionistic criticism, the freedom with which things are explained on grounds of intuition, and the demand that the activity of the critic should consist in an act of sympathy or identification and not in a function of the intellect or judgment. The high-pitched tone of this *panlyrisme*, the perpetual strain of exultation or pathos, all the forms of excess which have been rampant in recent French literature

make him observe somewhat despairingly: 'It seems as if temperate and reasonable writing has lost all kind of æsthetic value for French society'—for that society whose literature was once the most reasonable and moderate in the world.

The last and most surprising conquest of lyricism is declared to have taken place in the contemporary stronghold of Minerva herself. While exposing the invasion of present modes of thought by the passionate over-emphasis characteristic of our age, M. Benda had the temerity to include in his condemnation the neo-classicism of Charles Maurras. For him, this was only *une forme particulière du besoin de l'excessif*, and he stigmatized it as the 'Romanticism of Reason'.

The phrase has had considerable vogue with the enemies of Maurras, not least with those who feel that while the objects of the school of Moréas may be commendable, the intransigent, splenetic and almost fanatical spirit of some of its present representatives is at furthest remove from the ideal of classical decorum and serenity which it should be their duty to practise as well as preach. To have pierced the rigid seriousness of the Maurrasian guard

with a point of irony which lays bare a real defect in tactics, is surely not the least remarkable achievement of the critic from Sirius.[1]

The book closes with some reflexions on the cause and origin of the evils hitherto discussed. M. Benda, himself of Jewish descent, is not satisfied with the indictment of the Jews. He admits the part they have played in precipitating society into Alexandrianism, but he insists that French society was already Alexandrian. *L'action juive* was just the nucleus of matter around which the mass crystallized. A more probable explanation would be simply the *age* of the society in question, entailing the natural defects of prolonged refinements. But he is best pleased with citing the low state of culture characteristic of the average member of good society to-day. He thinks that the modern tendency to demand *sensations* from the

[1] M. Benda's opposition to M. Maurras grows with each new publication. It culminates for the present in the repeated jibes, made at the expense of the Royalist leader and programme, in the *Trahison des Clercs*, and in the deliberate attack of *Notes sur la Réaction* (*Nouvelle Revue française*, August, 1929). It appears more and more incidental that his criticism should coincide with any of the prevalent attacks on Romanticism.

product of the mind has been aided and abetted by the immense development of modern luxuries. And lastly, one of the crucial reasons for the quality of the æsthetic that reigns is that it is *faite par les femmes*, in saying which the author of *Belphégor* signs an agreement with all the critics of Romanticism.

III

A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF ROMANTICISM

AMONG the many eminent Frenchmen at present engaged in the assault on Romanticism, none has studied the historical side of the problem of origins with more persistence than M. le baron Ernest Seillière, or with anything like his elaborate scope. In a recent *examen de conscience*, published for the centenary of 1827,[1] he claims to have devoted thirty years of intellectual effort to the philosophical history of Romanticism, with results which, in the time of Renan and Taine, might have been characterized as *Les Origines de l'Idéologie contemporaine*. To-day they pass muster as the *Philosophy of Imperialism*, though always with a warning as to the special meaning attributed to the latter term. Far from having any bearing on the construction of empires, the work of M. Seillière is concerned

[1] *Pour le Centenaire du Romantisme.* Champion, 1927.

with the criticism of our contemporary ethos and civilization, root, trunk and branch. From the literary standpoint, it is an exhaustive attack on the Romantic position, approached from a personal angle and engaged single-handed in a prolonged and tenacious battle of attrition, based on tactics and strategies often opposed to those favoured by his contemporaries. This aloofness, this particularity of standpoint is no doubt responsible in part for the relative neglect of M. Seillière's work. Its very dimensions—some forty volumes and several hundred articles, devoted with almost technical competence, to tackling the main problem along the diverse lines of psychology, sociology, metaphysics and mysticism—militate against its reception by the reading public in France. But there is obviously another reason which keeps its author in the background, behind such men as MM. Charles Maurras and Pierre Lasserre. Maurras is a great writer, Lasserre a good writer, Seillière simply wields a fluent pen. But it is the pen of a thinker. If not of a profound thinker, nor of a very fine one, certainly of a vast-scale, versatile, patient and systematic thinker, whose theories, to say the least of them, have not prevented

the illumination of many dark phases in the origins and history of modern ideas.

M. Seillière is essentially an *homme de système*. Along with his wide erudition goes a somewhat Germanic partiality for extensive synthesis, which absorbs and collates literary and historical data with a rapidity which is imposing, even when it is not altogether reassuring. The reader's mind wavers between evidences of a remarkable resilience of theory and suspicions of a subtle coercion of fact, disguised under peculiarities of language which sometimes amount to an almost disconcerting misappropriation of consecrated usages.

For in order to embrace his enormous field of phenomena in some sort of regulating schema or unifying law, the author of the *Philosophy of Imperialism* has evolved a curious technique of definitions by transposing for his own purposes a number of terms, hitherto accepted in a sense different from his, which must first be grasped before we can appreciate his standpoint and contribution.

This is not an easy matter. Despite the comprehensiveness of his aims, M. Seillière has not yet condensed into the compass of a single volume an adequate summary or synopsis of

his *Œuvre*. The little essay published by Stock in 1925, in which we find the best outline of his ideas on *Le Romantisme*, is doubtless too cursory and one-sided to satisfy its author. He refers those in search of *vues d'ensemble* to any of the half-dozen studies, written by different hands in France and abroad, of which the best accredited seem to be M. Bourdeau's *Ernest Seillière, historien du Mysticisme Romantique*, and M. Gillouin's *Une Nouvelle Philosophie de l'Histoire moderne et française*. Following this suggestion, with the help of some of his own writings, I shall attempt a definition of M. Seillière's *principia* —Imperialism, Mysticism, Reason—and conclude with a rapid survey of his general theory.

The word Imperialism has been used in France either as an equivalent of Bonapartism, or more commonly nowadays, in our sense, with reference to British policy of empire. M. Seillière's use is not political, but philosophical and sociological, having special application to modern racial psychology. For him the typical expression of the human being, the source and principle of human action, is the impulse to dominate over the external world, *cette tendance de l'être à l'expression vers le dehors*

—to quote M. Gillouin, who finds analogies between it and Nietzsche's 'Will to Power', Taine's *faculté maîtresse* and Bergson's *élan vital*. M. Seillière himself is responsible for the comparison with Nietzsche; he also likens his notion of Imperialism to the *libido dominandi* of Catholic theology, to the *esprit de principauté* of the French Jansenists and to Hobbes' 'love of power'.

While working out the ramifications of this idea, its author was struck by the important rôle played in human affairs by phenomena of a mystical nature, and especially by the fact that all human and collective ambitions are accompanied by a conviction of the sanction or support of superhuman powers. Hence his basal conception of the *mysticisme d'alliance*, or what may be called the God-with-us assurance, common to all forms of mysticism—inspiration, ecstasy, exaltation or enthusiasm—and lying at the root of the Imperialistic instinct itself. One must be careful not to give too personal an interpretation to this idea of the mystical ally. Mysticism, for M. Seillière, is man's belief in the collaboration of someone *or* something, outside or above himself. It may be Nature or natural forces just as much as a personal

deity that participates in his Imperialistic ventures.

Every man is, or should be, an Imperialist. This side of a man's nature is usually revealed in individual action. The danger it involves is a matter of proportion, increasing with the preponderance of the mystical element and its 'divine' sanction, or with a decrease of rational control and the natural restraint exerted by the reason upon the incitements of faith in the superhuman complicity. In other words, there is a good and a bad imperialism, according as to whether it is, or is not, in conformity with reason. And M. Seillière defines reason as social experience condensed in tradition, or as the synthetized experience of the race controlling and virtualizing the imperialistic and mystical tendencies. A proper personal imperialism is, therefore, a just mean between the demands of the individual and the demands of tradition and society. And a rational dose of mysticism is a 'tonic' that may stimulate to the highest kinds of social usefulness.

Unfortunately the most serious characteristic of the last few centuries of social history has been the disproportionate advance of Mystic Imperialism and its over-cultivation at the

expense of Reason. Before M. Seillière, Gustave Le Bon had distinguished as a prominent characteristic of the modern world the prodigious increase in volume and intensity of a complex type of mysticism, emancipated from the categories of traditional Christianity and generally identical with what is known as Natural Religion. Following M. Gillouin, we distinguish, as its main varieties:

(i) Race mysticism—the idea of being the chosen people, differently illustrated in Israel, England and Modern Germany.

(ii) Social mysticism, proceeding from the Rousseauistic doctrine of the natural goodness of man, and expressing itself in the democratic ideal of 1789, and later, in the proletarian ideal which dates from Fourier and Marx, and fructifies in Tolstoy and the Russian revolution.

(iii) Erotic mysticism, which, in the words of our author, identifies the sexual impulse with the voice of God, in opposition to the Christian identification of it with the voice of the Devil.

(iv) The Religion of Beauty (*le mysticisme esthétique*), which sees in the man of genius, or simply in the artist, the privileged son of

God and of Nature, the finished type of humanity, the inspired guide and born leader of men; and which considers artistic creation, and even artistic contemplation, as a state in itself divine. M. Seillière admits that the religion of beauty may have reasonable justification, if beauty is conceived as order, proportion, measure. When, however, with most Romantic artists, we define beauty in terms of instinct or of nature, esthetic mysticism becomes the ally of irrational forces and anti-social tendencies.

Critics, even friendly critics like M. l'abbé Bremond, have not ceased to reproach M. Seillière with a tendency 'to debase the most august terms of the Christian language'. And the general reaction to his work is that it shows more scope than subtlety in the handling of problems which bristle with unrealized complexities. Its vast schematizations, ingenious and suggestive as theories, are suspected of having achieved their appearance of inevitable completeness by leaving too much out of account. M. Bremond smiles at M. Seillière's conception of Romanticism as the 'canonization of the seven deadly sins'. M.

Maritain deplores his misuse of the term Mysticism.

This reproach may be thought a little too severe. The philosophic habit of adopting old terms for new purposes seldom makes for immediate clarity of expression. But in this case the special terminology has been defined frequently enough (Heaven knows!) to remove just cause for complaint on grounds of unfamiliarity or confusion. What M. Seillière means by Romantic Mysticism should be clear from his own writings. But if it is not, we recommend the following paragraph from M. Henri Massis' *Réflexions sur l'Art du Roman*, where we find, expressed in simpler terms, a notion similar to M. Seillière's:

'The romantics are essentially *those who do not call things by their names.* We have said nothing against them, or we have said something insufficient, when we reproach them with their individualism. The real harm is that they have called this individualism charity, that they have represented human love as having the flavour of divine love, that they have put man in the place of God, and have called him God, that their lyricism has every-

where substituted false and confused images for notions that were real and precise. . . . Nothing is more dangerous for a society than to have forgotten the sense of the terms it employs. This is the cause of the great romantic perturbation.'

The main effort of M. Seillière's analysis of the modern types of Mysticism enumerated above is to trace their contemporary ramifications back to the deep stream of Rousseau's influence, and to its source in the weaker side of Catholic mysticism illustrated in the Quietism of the seventeenth century; and simultaneously to identify the whole of this disintegrating movement with the preparation, formation and efflorescence of Romanticism. In the course of a fairly recent review he admitted the difficulty of denominating what he considers the reprehensible part of Romanticism. The aspect of that movement which he contests is best defined as *Naturisme*—that type of modern nature worship or natural religion which, denying original sin and, by anticipation, the evolutionary views of the nineteenth century, has proclaimed man to be naturally good. Disapproval of this creed

leaves much in literary Romanticism for M. Seillière to approve of, and when he comes to consider the attitude of his contemporaries towards definite issues and individuals, he frequently feels more in sympathy with the pro-romantics than with their direct opponents, among whom he is sometimes embarrassed to find himself classed.[1]

The emphasis laid on the contribution of Catholicism to the origins of Romanticism is a point of difference which separates M. Seillière absolutely from the rest of anti-romantic critics. Parallel to the Protestant movement, he argues, there appears, growing more and more clear, at first orthodox, but gradually slipping into heterodoxy, another mystical movement whose success was not to be less considerable in the long run. Inaugurated in the bosom of the Catholic Church, and with its approval, by women and directors of women like St. Catherine and St. John of the Cross, it soon degenerated in the hands of other women and of men still more feminine in their leanings than these first directors of conscience. The Quietist or Illuminist type of

[1] Cf. *Journal des Débats: Feuilleton*, 7 February and 8 May, 1924.

mysticism, spreading widely through France during the seventeenth century, culminated in the work of Mme. Guyon, who contrived to give this ambitious metaphysical system a specious appearance of logic and cohesion.

M. Gillouin, whose *résumé* we paraphrase in the foregoing paragraph, proceeds to emphasize the part played by women here and later in the shaping and reception of Romanticism. He quotes M. Seillière's definition of Rousseauism as a Christian heresy *de nuance féminine*, Prud'hon's qualification of the Romantics as *femmelins*, and Sainte-Beuve's definition of the *universelle insurrection féminine*, which occurred between the appearance of *Emile* and the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and the French Revolution. He recalls Lamartine's excuse: '*J'ai pour moi les femmes et les jeunes gens.*' And he reverts to his author with: '*Nous vivons depuis plus de deux siècles SOUS LE SIGNE DE LA FEMME.*'

Curiously enough, no mention is made of what is the most brilliant of contemporary sallies in this direction, the *Romantisme féminin* of M. Charles Maurras. Though, doubtless, this omission is less curious than significant of the profound divergence of views that separates

M. Seillière's type of Anti-romanticism from that of M. Maurras. The former's association of the origins of Rousseauism with a form of Catholic mysticism, along with his recognition of Protestant values, places him in strong opposition to the royalist leader, for whom the noxious filiation that has produced Romanticism is epitomized in the phrase, '*Prophétisme —Protestantisme—Rousseauisme*'.

Having found in the Quietist heresy and in the *Lettres édifiantes* of Jesuit missionaries to America, the sources of Rousseauism, M. Seillière perceived that while this double influence explained its origins on the social and psychological sides, it offered no explanation of that erotic mysticism which he found no less strikingly characteristic of Romanticism. Starting from the fact that Rousseau was from childhood a great reader of novels, M. Seillière was led to direct his researches towards the discovery, in mediaeval romance, of the supplementary sources of which he was in search. After prolonged retrospective investigations, he claims to have established a definite sequence between Platonism, Neoplatonism, the courtly lyric, the Romance of Chivalry and the seventeenth-century Pastoral, on the one hand, and

on the other, the erotic mysticism of the post-Rousseauistic era. For the detail of this line of inquiry, I must refer the reader to what is probably his most significant work, one which his commentator has called a veritable philosophy of the history of the novel—*Les Origines romanesques de la Morale et de la Politique romantiques.* Having here and in one or two similar works established his critical standpoint, M. Seillière has since devoted himself to extending its application to representative figures and fluctuations in literature and thought since Rousseau.

To reveal the critic engaged upon a concrete case, one should, however, recommend his study of George Sand. Not merely because the *avant-propos et définitions préalables* form a valuable introduction to M. Seillière's method, but mainly because no subject could have so much to offer his type of analysis as this passionate woman of genius who recognized in Rousseau the Christ of our age. Nor could a better instance be found of what M. Seillière means by *mysticisme passionnel* than that presented by the celebrated *amante* of Alfred de Musset, who, on the threshold of her reckless liaison with that irresponsible poet,

could impulsively thank God for having revealed the true conditions of her spiritual regeneration! M. Seillière places her second only to Rousseau in the art of self-justification by sophistry. '*Nous sommes tous de grands sophistes*' she admits in the *Lettres d'un voyageur* '*le sophisme a tout envahi.*' His final estimate of her place in the history of Romantic degeneration will serve as an excellent conclusion to this brief discussion of his extensive contribution and distinctive method:

'She was indeed, we think, one of the most complete theorizers, one of the most supple theologians of the mysticism of Rousseau, that most evident religion of our age. Similarly, about a century and a half before her time, another French woman, Jeanne de la Motte-Guyon, had been the most insistent and skilful interpreter of the Quietist type of mysticism, heir to the effeminate mysticism of preceding centuries, and initiator, to a large extent, of the lay mysticism preached by Jean-Jacques. If that showy rhetorician but mighty lyrist has become in some sort the Christ of the modern faith, if Goethe was something like its Saint Paul, using his genius to adapt it to

the requirements of the middle classes, if Hugo, with his cloudy ecstasies, was its St. John of Patmos, George Sand, subtle expositor of the divine grace of passion and revolution, might be considered as its Augustine—she who, so readily on many occasions, applied to herself the penetrating avowals of Cassiciacum: *Amatum, amare . . . teneat me vesta mea carnea!*'

IV

THE CASE FOR THE DEFENCE

In some recently published intimate writings, M. André Gide seriously discusses whether the Devil is classic or romantic. A decision from so authoritative a source would have been final, and this chapter would have completely effaced itself behind his verdict. But alas! the subtlest of living psychologists has decided that the Devil can be either, so we must seek conclusions elsewhere.

Early in 1921, M. Émile Henriot, literary editor of the *Temps*, published in a weekly review, *La Renaissance politique et littéraire*, the results of an inquiry on the question of Classicism and Romanticism in France, which had just been reopened by a difference of opinion between M. Raymond de la Tailhède and M. Charles Maurras. The replies, which came from the most eminent pens, show that the question was, as it still is, the literary topic

of the day. Few profess indifference. All serious minds, if one may judge by this representative, though not quite recent, selection, appear to be affected. An unsuspected number reveal themselves favourable to Classicism, provided that they are allowed to define it in their own terms. There are comparatively few outspoken pro-Romantics, though the contributions of one or two of these (Madame la Comtesse de Noailles and M. Georges Duhamel especially) are amongst the most impressive of the replies. There is much diversity of opinion, much independence of feeling, and no proof of wholesale conformity to the standpoint of neo-classicism. Roughly speaking, it is felt to be too rigid.

The idea of a classical reaction may, or may not, be regarded as the property of the neo-classics. It is certainly they who have made it popular. But it has never been their exclusive monopoly. Others have been looking in a similar direction and working for a similar end, with their own eyes and hands. Much divergence of means and even of ideals is shown in the replies to the inquiry just mentioned. The notion of a clear-cut opposition between classic and romantic, the sharp dualism which is an

essential premise with some of these writers, is far from being shared by all. Many of them imagine the new classicism they are seeking, not so much as a violent break with the immediate past and a reversion to modes which may have become definitely superannuated, as in the form of an organic development, a refining process to be imposed on the rich heritage of the nineteenth century.

Jacques Rivière adumbrated the ideal of a classical renaissance as clearly as was then possible, when he took over the direction of the *Nouvelle Revue française* after the War. His notion was not a pure or textual imitation of the classics, but a profound and inward movement, a rehabilitation of Intelligence, not to the exclusion of sensibility, but penetrating, analysing and dominating sensibility.[1]

M. André Gide put a not dissimilar point of view in his own way. True classicism, he wrote in answer to the *Renaissance* inquiry, is not the result of external restraint, which produces not classical but academic work. The qualities which produce classicism are internal, and essentially moral, qualities—'*un*

[1] *La Nouvelle Revue française. Nouvelle Série*, 1 June, 1919, p. 7.

harmonieux faisceau de vertus dont la première est la modestie'. Romanticism is dogged by pride and infatuation. Classical perfection implies not the suppression of the individual, but his subordination in a hierarchy. M. Gide sees the classic-romantic struggle going on in the breast of each individual artist. True classicism is creative, not conservative. It spurns archaism and will not believe that all has been said.

Another distinguished contemporary who refuses to consider the problem in definitely opposed categories, is M. Paul Valéry. A pertinent suggestion is made in the introduction he wrote for a recent edition of the *Fleurs du Mal*. Classic and romantic are here regarded as *phases* essential to the development of art and literature, the romantic phase being the 'colonization' of new territory, the classic, its economic development and perfect organization. *Tout classique suppose un romantisme antérieur*. It is reflection following upon inspiration, selection upon receptivity, order upon disorder. This process is apparent in the life of every artist who lives long enough to find himself.

Such views as these have neither the elabor-

ateness and cohesion of the neo-classical arguments, nor their defect of rigid schematization. In comparison with eclectic thinkers like Gide and Valéry, the anti-romantic critics appear all more or less addicted to system and apriorism. Their literary judgments are, in varying degrees, controlled by extra-literary convictions and objectives. It is not enough for them that criticism should be judgment, it must be a form of militarism. Moreover they are simply critics. They have 'created' little or nothing; though for some of them this is the reverse of a defect. The *École critique* of 1912 was not only conscious, but proud, of its nature: 'What we are erecting is, as you see, a critique. Contemporary letters have no more urgent need.'[1] To which the opposition, in so far as it may be identified with M. Georges Duhamel, replies: '*Tous les amis de M. Maurras sont des esprits critiques déliés, presque jamais des créateurs. Vous allez me citer Moréas. Mais une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps.*' . . . And he observes: '*Jamais aucune volonté particulière ne fera renaître une littérature qui ne veut pas renaître.*'[2] That

[1] *Le Temps*, 24 April, 1912.
[2] *La Renaissance*, 8 January, 1921.

indeed is the rub. While creation lingers, the critics of M. Maurras may always repeat what M. Constant Bourquin wrote in his book on Julien Benda: 'It is enough to say that classicism is not an affair of the will, but the result of a group of causes which do not operate to-day. People do not decide to be classic; one is classic by temperament, just as one is romantic.' To which M. Maurras might answer that the reason why he came out of literature into politics was precisely in order to prepare a new 'group of causes'. One may sympathize with Maurras' point of view; but the difficulty in accepting it is that he seems to want not only to put a period and type of literature in its place, but to disparage it out of existence. It is one thing to fall upon the degenerate offspring of an ageing Romanticism, another to discredit and deny the prophets, priests and kings of a movement once so vital and inspiring. Prophets, priests and kings have a way of coming through fire diminished, maybe, but not destroyed.

This is the reservation which Maurice Barrès made with much warmth in an article upon which the critics of Neo-classicism seem to rely

for one of their best arguments.[1] Barrès will not give up, indeed he cannot help *adoring*, the nineteenth century: '*Je ne suis pas près de cesser de l'aimer.*' Why? Because its leaders have been heroically, and often desperately, engaged in a quest for direction and discipline amid the tumult and confusion of a transitional age:

'*. . . la recherche de ce frein et de cette orientation depuis un siècle nous tourmente. Où trouver la paix? Comment s'échapper à notre désordre d'âme? Tel est le cri que je distingue au milieu de toutes les apostrophes des romantiques. . . .*'

We need not blush nowadays at their splendid, groping efforts. In them we should feel the ardour of new hopes. So many dreams and desires cannot come to nought:

'To-day those early Romantics appear, for me at least, as superior men who struggled against general causes of diminution and came out best . . . I still love and admire the great books of Romanticism. I consider them useful

[1] *L'Echo de Paris*, 28 September, 1912. Collected in the volume called *Les Maîtres*.

as the description of sufferings endured by an élite, struggling through storms and tossing seas to gain the shore. Yes, I believe one can conceive of the best thought of the nineteenth century, as a series of efforts, made by the Masters (often unknown to themselves) to denounce the *mal du siècle* and to eliminate the noxious ferments of a society which had lost its *cadres* and in which ardent multitudes are forming with their new demands.'

Then comes the most pertinent point in the article. Does Barrès deny Charles Maurras, Pierre Lasserre and Jules Lamaître? Not at all. Lasserre's thesis is epoch-making. Maurras is the only writer to-day who has Carlyle's ideal virtue of producing a new faith. He has, moreover, a new standpoint to judge the romantic writers from, a true and elevated standpoint which helps his contemporaries out of their hackneyed, servile and trite adorations of the past. Barrès accepts the diagnosis of Maurras and his friends on the *mal romantique*. But he will not sacrifice the masters; he will not deny ancestors who are greater than any of their descendants. These distinctions do not prevent his agreeing as to the imperious

necessity for a return to classicism. Barrès defines the demands of the time in a masterly conclusion:

'We want a traditional *cadre* which will permit the genuine French mind, the *truth* as we see it, to develop and flourish happily. . . . We reject a parasite mentality and claim the right to become free men. What we demand above all is the restoration of our deepest nature. We feel persuaded that, in order that it should flourish, a discipline is necessary; but the danger is in too rigid a discipline and in formulas which might entail vital sacrifices.'

This article is one of the chief witnesses for the defence. Frequent reference to it is made in what is the best introduction to the whole controversy as it has developed in France since 1914—a pamphlet published by the *Association des Etudes françaises* and called *Pour et contre le Romantisme*. It consists of a complete bibliography from 1914 to 1926, a concise and documented history of the discussion by MM. Giraud [1] and Moncel and an introduction by

[1] M. Giraud is also the author of an *Apologie pour le Romantisme*, which he describes as '*discrète et mesurée, mais*

Professor Baldensberger. Both these contributions have a pro-romantic bias and contain points of interest.

M. Baldensberger puts the favourite and, on its own ground, unanswerable, historical argument which is the natural basis of an Academic defence. Any definition of French literature must be broad enough to include the notion of romanticism. Like classicism and realism, romanticism is a fact of the past and the present, fostered and conditioned by a definite set of circumstances and answering peculiar needs.

'Granted,' one can imagine a certain school of critics replying: 'Romanticism is only too much of a fact, but need we have any more of it?' 'Yes, while such conditions as produced

très ferme et très motivée'. The author is evidently a Romantic by taste and sympathy; he 'apologizes' for Romanticism on grounds familiar to any reader of nineteenth-century text-books on the subject. His contribution to the discussion, which has been published separately, originally formed part of a thesis on *Emile Deschamps*. M. Seillière, reviewing this work in the *Journal des Débats* (*Feuilleton*, 8 *Mars*, 1924) made a good point. Deschamps is the most classic of the romantics, '*un bourgeois dilettante à l'époque romantique*'. How could he be considered characteristic of Romanticism? And how far is a defence of that movement valid, when based on its least representative figure?

it still prevail.'—'Precisely! it is just those conditions we are concerned to remove: *Politique d'abord!*'

For their most brilliant supporter those concerned with the defence of Romanticism, turn to that versatile Academician, M. l'abbé Henri Bremond. Not that there is much that may be given as evidence for the defence in his two recent volumes, *La Poésie pure* and *Prière et Poésie*. Yet the conception on which they are based—the first on the idea of a pure, ethereal lyricism, constituting alone what is meant by poetry, the second on the approximation of this elevated quintessence to mysticism—is a common Romantic position, and not perhaps so troublesome to our tastes as it appears to have been to our neighbours', judging by the immense controversy that raged a year or two ago around the definition of 'pure poetry,' and which M. Bremond himself has called a 'debauch of dialectics over a handful of truisms'.

The recent discussion was stimulated by a brief discourse, delivered by the abbé at the Institut, which according to M. Robert de Souza, had the exceptional audacity of presenting a general, a cosmopolitan, view of

poetry, without introducing the time-honoured opposition of the French variety to the Anglo-Saxon. The writings of M. Bremond reveal a remarkable knowledge of English poetry and English poetic theory and criticism. Poe, Carlyle, Ruskin, Pater, Edward Caird, Mrs. Meynell, Mrs. Maxwell, Mr. Middleton Murry —we cannot help the thought that while M. Bremond's erudition flatters us, it may be a serious criticism of his arguments, from a French standpoint, that for positive theoretic basis he has so often to turn from his own countrymen to ours. It is at least a reflection on the great French apologists for Romanticism, that their lineal descendant can find so little to help him in their manifestos.

La Poésie pure is the latest refinement on the 'modern' views of Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and M. Paul Valéry—though it must at once be said that these names represent a loose filiation, rather than a definite chain of influence, culminating in M. Bremond's argument. From a strictly classical standpoint, it defines poetry in terms of *pure sensibility*.[1] This view tends to reduce the mass of great poetry to a dust of fine gold. From the

[1] 'Pure instinct', said the arch-enemy, Paul Souday.

quotations given in illustration, one might almost be justified in saying that for M. Bremond, poetry is a matter of separate lines and isolated phrases. Poetry seems for him so perishable a perfection, so fragile a *fine fleur*, that it cannot bloom for more than a minute fraction of the half-hour allotted to its span by Edgar Allan Poe. To this the strong sense of Paul Souday has given what seems to be the irrefutable reply: '*Ce n'est pas le vers détaché, c'est l'ensemble qui est beau. C'est tout Virgile et tout Lucrèce.*'[1]

In *Prière et Poésie*, M. Bremond's point of view somewhat resembles that of Mr. Middleton Murry, from whom he quotes frequently and with evident satisfaction. For M. Bremond, literature, since the coming of Romanticism, is 'the great religious adventure of the human soul'. Every perfect romantic is a Christian, and every imperfect one hides a Pascal in his heart. His conclusion is that there is a necessary *rapprochement* (not identification) between the poetic experience and the mystical experience. The poet is a *mystique manqué*.

M. Bremond is the least 'systematic' of all

[1] *Le Temps*, 23 June, 1927.

those engaged in the present controversy, which, as a purely literary dispute, he considers vain. He hopes by broadening its basis to prove its absurdity. Along with Victor Hugo, Shakespeare must be damned, and Pascal, and if Romanticism is to be identified with original sin, then the blame must rest, not with Rousseau, but with Adam! If it is possible to 'place' a mind so agile and alert as his, I should label him, after reading *Pour le Romantisme* (1924), a *romantique conservateur*. He declares in the preface that he can accept the whole of M. Lasserre's *Romantisme français*—no slight morsel for a sensitive gourmet of romantic *friandises* to swallow at a gulp. But he is the sworn enemy of neo-classics, neo-rationalists and all who give the *raison classique* absolute sway.

M. Bremond, not a systematizer, after *La Poésie pure*, and especially after *Prière et Poésie*? Alas, indeed! Why should he have deserted the sound direction laid down in the essay on *Sainte-Beuve et l'Intelligence*? Like his great exemplar, M. Bremond is at his best when he leaves systems and theories to his opponents, and concentrates on concrete cases. This apology, *Pour le Romantisme*—

what a slight thesis it would appear to maintain, judged by the preface! In what sense, it might be asked, is this volume of essays a defence of Romanticism? Not by argument, certainly, but perhaps, as the author suggests, by 'insinuation'. The remarkably sympathetic essay on Scott, the admirable study of Barrès, the skilful, if not convincing, analysis of Sainte-Beuve's 'catholicism' constitute the most able indirect plea for 'conservative romanticism' in the whole of contemporary criticism; and in their general conclusions they are difficult to refute. M. Bremond, author of the masterly *Histoire littéraire du Sentiment religieux en France*, has a personal point of view which he tends to apply only too insistently in criticism. But when this temptation is avoided, he can lead us into the open, where, after the hot-house of apriorism, dense with what he calls its '*opacité philosophique*', we are glad to breathe free air.

V

ROMANTIC DEGENERATION

Outside France, he would be a bold man who should bring the indictment of degeneration against the French and their literature, while the failure of Max Nordau's once notorious attempt still survives oblivion. Nowadays, however, bold initiative threatens to pass from the hands of men to those of women. Miss Laura Riding for instance has no hesitation in proclaiming the decline of French literature. Or rather she stoutly affirms decline to be the natural and normal condition of that literature. Such a conviction, held by so vigorous a critic of contemporary errors and affectations, might strike alarm into hearts that love France, had not M. Julien Benda recently assured us that literatures are always in decline, save for rare interludes of vital reaction that briefly but mercifully check the universal drift down the slope of least resistance.

It would be an interesting exercise to trace,

through the devious channels of critical opinion, the growth and application of that idea of decadence which has been associated with French literature since the beginning of the last century. Such an investigation would, I think, show that the more numerous condemnations come from native, not from external sources, and that these far outweigh in seriousness and intensity those brought against France by critics abroad.

Foreign criticism exults as little to-day as does the French in the genius and production of Victor Hugo; yet the last judgment an outsider would be likely to pass on the most sanguine and superabundant of poets would be that of decadence. This, however, is the word which recurs as a sort of *motif* throughout Nisard's critique, *M. Victor Hugo en* 1836. The author, it surprises one to notice, was particularly distressed with the marks of this *caractère de décadence*, which he found amidst the harmless and fashionable melancholy of the *Chants du Crépuscule*. A single instance does not prove my contention. But I think it probable that the impartial inquirer would, as he followed out the course suggested, be more impressed by the vigilance and sincerity

of literary self-criticism in France than fully and finally convinced of the artistic and moral inferiority of French literature, as compared with that of any other country during the nineteenth century.

Another fact would, I imagine, impress him still more. Such charges as have been multiplied within the pale generally appear to conform not to the facile fault-findings of censorious observers, made at the expense of enfeebled and defenceless production, but to the more or less guarded reservations of serious judges scrutinizing a literature which they admit to be prodigiously alive, animated with adventure and experiment and conscious of its power—a type of literature, in fact, which has but the one grave defect that, when judged from the highest standards known to cultivated taste, its vigour and energy are felt to be the vigour and energy of barbarism and excess. Victor Hugo, from such a standpoint, appears a *roi barbare*. Lamartine's later work becomes tainted with *la corruption de l'ambroisie*.

'In accepting the painful rôle' wrote Sainte-Beuve, in a valedictory article on the Romantic School, 'of marking the checks, the falls, the

premature decline of the many minds that we admire, we would like it to be known that there is no feeling in us which applauds all this. Alas! their ruin (if it be a question of ruin), is it not ours, as their triumph, so often predicted, would have been our pride and joy? . . . The best of our funds was embarked along with their reputations, and we feel involved for the greater part of what we are worth, in the peril of their shipwreck.'

Despite those contagious outbursts of exaggerated spleen to which the most prominent group of anti-romantics so frequently give way, it is generally in the tone and spirit of Sainte-Beuve that most of the present attacks are conducted. Relying on observations drawn from the wider field, a foreigner may perhaps venture, not indeed upon the ungrateful and impossible task which Burke defined as bringing an indictment against a nation, but upon some attempt to give an account of the contemporary current of reaction and self-analysis going on in the French literary conscience of to-day. Ignoring for the time all evidence for the defence, I propose to resume the case against Romanticism—or more precisely, the case made out against

what Romanticism has become in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even where the *résumé* has, for the sake of conciseness, to be made in my own terms, authoritative support could, I believe, be found for almost every word in the following diagnosis.

The genius of French literature yields to rational control, under which it thrives and blossoms. Liberated, it is in danger of deteriorating. In many Frenchmen's opinion, no form of liberalism is good for France, where standpoints are almost as various as individuals, and where individuals, when they are given the chance, are so trenchantly individualistic. Liberalism, said Faguet, is not French.

Romanticism has produced much work of fine quality. But it has had the effect of unfettering certain violent personal tendencies, kept well under in the classical age, and which, left to their own logical impulses, have rapidly degenerated into all manner of extremes, excesses and eccentricities. Most critics of Romanticism emphasize its defects as of the nature of *excesses*. 'This senseless desire' wrote M. Charles Maurras in the *Chemin de Paradis* 'to raise every human life

to the pitch of paroxysm is at bottom of the error which deprives all hearts of peace.'

French Romanticism was at first, and quite justifiably, a destructive revolt, a revolt from, a destruction of, a degenerate pseudo-classicism. This negative side is dominant in all nineteenth-century literature. It is only when it would become constructive that the weakness is felt. Then Romanticism tends to forsake the rock of rationally ordered feeling, that intellectualized emotion on which the classics had built, for the quicksands of sensibility and sensation; and to indulge in a kind of overspecialization along irrational, or at least non-rational, instinctive and purely intuitive lines. What was at the beginning of the century a vast new conquest has been cultivated to produce a fascinating flora of anomalies, where it has not simply been allowed to grow wild into jungles of extravagance. The study of personality has degenerated into a silhouetting of idiosyncrasies. The immortal moods are sacrificed to a grimace. And why not? A gesture, a grimace may be as revealing as a mood. To the external, imaginative, *romantic* observer, yes! A world of fantasy may be *read into* a grimace. The

undeviating objective analysis of a soul—but how tedious!

Something new, something original, a search for the *inédit*, the *inouï*—anything to outdo, outreach, outshine the whole tradition, romantic and classic, that has pressed on the brows of a century of French artists like an ornate and ineluctable diadem of despair! An unwieldy and reproving crown of curious properties, that may be cast down and kicked into an obscure corner of the *tour d'ivoire*, but will assuredly sooner or later, transform itself into the Frenchman's equivalent for a skeleton in the cupboard. '*La hantise de l'original*' says M. Benjamin Crémieux '*a été la plaie des cinquante dernières années littéraires.*' And M. Seillière confesses that, to grip opinion in France to-day, it is almost essential to bring with you something new, even if there is nothing new in the world.

The claim was revived recently that Romanticism has at least the virtue of having developed the study of Personality through its multiplication in literature. And doubtless one of its most important contributions is the variety of individuals it has differentiated. But a literature based on *difference* of human

specimens, and impelled by the necessity of being incessantly original, was bound, before long, to have recourse to the cultivation of the eccentric and the abnormal. Strangeness, idiosyncrasy, the exceptional, the exotic, the neurotic, these qualities have become accepted as the very components, the *sine qua non* of beauty. The beautiful, as Remy de Gourmont defined it for a recent generation, is composed of novelty and strangeness.

Now this compulsion to invent *de novo*, while it may happily interrupt the complacent repetition of the banal, tends to divert from the grandeur of the commonplace, and, logically pursued, must lead to supersubtlety and over-refinement, to allusive vagueness and monstrous unreality, to pretentiousness, preciosity and to all the perversities. From a certain standpoint even this has its value. If we are prepared to accept literature as a study of specimens, and progress in literature as the tabulation of human—and inhuman—varieties, then we may regard much recent production as at least an acquisition towards a complete psychological museum of morbid growths. But it may be premature to flatter ourselves that the stream of great literature has been

much enlarged or deepened thereby. Is it not more probable that during the nineteenth century its flow has been narrowed and retarded by accretions of this sort of picturesque jetsam and flotsam?

The century of hope! the scientific age! Who knows if one day it may not come to be regarded, in some of its aspects, as a sort of more recent Dark Age? A 'stupid' century it has already been called. It will at least have had its own variety of darkness—a darkness not of stagnation, certainly, but perhaps of delusion. The amount of original 'genius' it claims to have produced or discovered would have made it richer in that commodity than the rest of historical time, had not the recent variety a way of fading into the light of common talent when compared with the greatness of a commonplace past.

Vanity and ignorance are, of course, at the base of this fatuous delusion. The complacency which goes with a certain kind of vigorous but undistinguished talent protects and encourages the self-engrossed indifference of many artists to what has gone before them; and recent tendencies in literature and

the arts have favoured and perpetuated the species. Most critics from Nisard to Sainte-Beuve and from Brunetière to Gosse have lamented these defects in their contemporaries. Many superior artists are conscious of them. Comparing the artists of to-day with an 'imitator' like Jean Racine, M. François Mauriac writes: '*ignorant tout, ils s'imaginent tout inventer*'.

But the most comprehensive protest made by a contemporary against the fallacy of romantic novelty will be found in the *Avenir de l'Intelligence*, where M. Charles Maurras writes:

'Formerly what was marvelled at in a poem was its conduct and disposition: its element of surprise did not proceed from the novelty of the *subject* chosen. The indifference of Greek art to the renewal of its themes in tragedy and lyricism is, in our days, considered a reproach, something amounting to an infirmity. The true masters would laugh at the maladive necessity which makes us exact from the matter of the poem the small emotion which they derived solely from the manner of its treatment. For them, the matter

was something common to all, given rather than discovered or invented. From the entire work and from that alone should flash the distinct personal quality of the poet. Even then the poet would draw his pride and strength from the power of his genius, not from the singularity of his nature. In Romanticism the principle is reversed: one is obliged to be original. Objects that are singular and rare are preferred to objects that are beautiful.'

The same critic has—and indeed which of recent critics has not?—deplored the consequences of romantic megalomania. Subjectivity has been rampant as never before in the history of human expression. Everything to do with the self of the writer is sacrosanct. Since Rousseau's declaration, at the beginning of the *Confessions*, sincerity has meant the complete abandonment of selection and reserve. It has become the artist's *raison d'être: 'Je n'avais qu'une méthode à prendre'*, writes one of the most advanced of contemporary poets, *'je l'ai prise: la sincérité. Tout raconter, tout étaler, vivre nu.'*[1]

One of the efforts of recent art has been to

[1] Jean Cocteau: *Lettre à Jacques Maritain*, p. 12.

invent ways of being, in this sense, more and more sincere. Indeed it has contributed towards a new conception of art and produced a new esthetic. With the neglect of selection, taste in the classical sense has become more and more uncommon. In order to justify an expansive type of art, having for object the 'expression of life', the notion of taste has become extended and diversified into something resembling, but far exceeding, the 'gusto' of Hazlitt—an ever more facile 'appreciation' of everything under the sun, from the crease in an ear to a locomotive's piston, from a flutter of ecstasy to the humblest physiological function.

Applied to nineteenth-century French literature as a whole, no claim is less justifiable than the one that is made on these grounds. On grounds of *comprehensiveness* there can be no doubt about the immense superiority of the classical achievement. 'Life', after which the majority of nineteenth-century realists strained so hard, has after all been nothing more inclusive than Zola's *tranche de vie*, a novelty and a conquest certainly, but like so many contemporary triumphs, a conquest over the material world simply,

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and of a narrow enough slice of it at that! The danger involved in the effort to say everything is to forget to say the things that count.

The predominance of sentiment over reason, of sensibility over feeling, and finally of sensationalism and sensuality over sensibility, have naturally entailed a whittling down of the raw material, the basic stuff, of literature and the arts, which have tended to draw more and more narrowly upon resources that have been deliberately restricted. Sensibility has been selected and refined into the supreme sterility of the *abscons*. Since Mallarmé, French poetry has not scrupled to run the gauntlet of an ever contracting esotericism. Thought, chased out of popular literature by the encroachments of feeling and sensation, has become the monopoly of *précieux*; and in a literature which yields to none in the broad intelligibility of its profoundest masterpieces, the claims of intellect are being defended by scattered groups of 'metaphysical' poets, withdrawn above the mêlée into the private schisms of their *chapelles littéraires*. On the other hand, we have the vigorous but undistinguished multitude who barter with the

populace in *la Foire sur la place*. But that the body and its functions are a meagre substitute for 'mind and heart' may be seen from the grotesque multiplication of the contemporary French novel around the triangular treatment of sex with its naïve, untiring recapitulation of physical accessories. In this cramping and unpromising direction, as M. François Mauriac has pointed out, even the best are driven by the very circumstances of modern life, whose relaxed codes have deprived the love-relationship of dramatic interest by destroying the rules of the game.[1]

It is interesting to trace the influence of these tendencies on the language of nineteenth-century poetry. Hugo frequently and notoriously allowed himself to be mastered by words, and the abuse of the vocable has waylaid French poetic style ever since the famous *Acte d'Accusation*. 'Let us admit' says M. André Thérive 'that the liberation of form has led our literary language to so rapid an evolution that it is really a dissolution. The right to say everything no matter how—that is what romanticism thought it could impose on the world. We know what the result

[1] M. François Mauriac: *Le Roman*, p. 28.

has been.' With Mallarmé, the *Verbe* acquired a sort of mystical significance, apart from its meaning. Many of the Symbolists strung words together for the sake of their colour, sound or effect in juxtaposition. Mannerism, the verbal counterpart of the cult of Originality, was never so conspicuous in the whole history of writing in French. M. André Gide makes a pertinent remark about it in *Incidences*: 'The painters and *littérateurs*, whom we praise most to-day, have a manner; the great classic artist strives to have no manner; he forces himself to be banal. If he attains banality without effort, he will not be a great artist, forsooth! The classical work will only be strong and beautiful by reason of its subjugated romanticism.'

In the course of the last century, the Word acquired what Maurras has called a carnal flavour, involving, for the language, a certain loss of character. 'A characteristic of our tongue' he said, in a recent interview 'is to be a little abstract. Well! this abstract character is less marked to-day. We communicate by images and metaphors. It is the *material* of the language, its verbal weight that attracts attention, rather than the relation of words

between themselves. Yet it is from the "*mot mis à sa place*" that true French draws its charm and power.' Maurras' appeal for a more abstract tongue reminds us that the 'concretization' of the language is considered by others also as one of the most serious defects of a tendency originating with Romanticism. M. Paul Valéry made an important observation on this subject in the course of his *Entretiens* with M. Frédéric Lefèvre, when he lamented the loss on the abstract side which the French tongue has suffered since the eighteenth century, resulting in decreased power to convey the operations of pure thought. Developments along imaginative and descriptive lines are poor substitutes when they leave the language impoverished in syntax and restricted in form. The distinguished poet ends his remarks with this suggestive paradox: '. . . *l'œuvre romantique, en prose du moins, est excessivement variée dans les mots, mais excessivement pauvre dans les fonctions*'. Even admitting that romantic prose is infinitely varied, so far as words go, this, he insists, applies only to *concrete* words, to the *sensorial* side of the vocabulary.

Of all contemporary French critics, the

most serenely indifferent to any kind of anti-romantic argument was the late Paul Souday. His verdict on the *crise du français* is, therefore, singularly valuable. 'No one can imagine', he said in his study of *Marcel Proust* 'without reading them from beginning to end and with attention, how badly written are the greater part of the new works. Evidently, the young writers do not know French at all. The language is decomposing, changing into a formless *patois*, and slipping into barbarism.' It assuredly points to an unparalleled moment of depression in French literary standards, when the output of the day can have united in the same dread of barbarism and dissolution two such incongruous figures as Paul Souday and Charles Maurras! When one adds the names of André Gide, Paul Valéry, Pierre Lasserre and Julien Benda, one finds, joined under a negative banner of common apprehension, half a dozen of the most disparate and most eminent intelligences in France. Nor is their reaction a mere fashion of the day. Their sternest censure is mild, compared with the irascible jottings which have come to light in Sainte-Beuve's recently published *Cahiers*: '*Jamais*

peut-être à aucun temps, la phrase et la couleur, le mensonge de la parole littéraire, n'ont autant prédominé sur le fond et sur le vrai que dans ces dernières années.' Indeed those secret and malicious distillations which the great critic called *Mes Poisons* contain in germ all the criticisms that have been levelled at the Romanticists since 1830.

VI

THE TRADITION OF DISSENT

'EVER since then' wrote Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith in his essay on *Four Romantic Words* 'the history of art has been the history of conscious and violent revolutions and reactions, instead of that gradual and unconscious modification of an inherited tradition which characterized its development in previous ages.' This statement refers to the general position of the arts and handicrafts since the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. But it applies with special force to the situation of literature in France, where the history of Romanticism has been a record of dissensions, producing, in the long run, a veritable tradition of dissent. Compared with the steadier progress of classical production, the development of romantic literature appears clearly as a sporadic series of disruptions and revolts, restlessly originating from within. The lava

of Individualism, ejected from the crater of the Revolution, has never cooled. It breaks out perpetually in new spurts and detours, with a scorching impulse to diversify and differentiate itself from the previous eccentricities of its flow. The Romantic spirit is alive, certainly, with a sort of nomadic dissatisfaction and disquietude, an inability to settle for long or to build firmly. Cain, Ahasuerus, Mazeppa, René are still, under thin disguises, its favourite incarnations; journeyings and voyages, however revolutionized in speed, facilities and risks, remain its preferred mode of existence. More and more it justifies a recently coined appellation—*la littérature des départs*. Yet with 'anywhere out of the world' for goal, it has never succeeded in getting outside itself. For though Romanticism in France has been, as I shall attempt to show, a record of dissensions, like Nonconformity in England, it clings to its 'fundamentals', even though they be but negative formulas of perpetual secession from the dogmas of a previous dispensation. One may still safely assert that the newest literary sect there will no more imply a reversion to Classicism than the last dissenting 'split' here connotes a

return to Catholicism. *Plus ça change. . . .* Already there is talk of a neo-romanticism. 'Un fait demeure patent', it was recently affirmed, 'L'état d'esprit—ou plutôt de sensibilité—qui a créé le romantisme se perpétue et se renouvelle.'[1] The curious 'ambivalence' of the situation is well brought out in the phrase of M. Pierre Lasserre: 'Nous ne croyons plus au Romantisme. Il n'a pas cessé de nous accabler.'

It is of the essence of a movement based on the delusive cult of originality to be perpetually discontented with itself. A notable feature of French Romanticism has been its inability to attain a formula that would satisfy more than a generation of adherents. Another is the violence of its internal reactions, which seem almost entirely motivated by the impulse to get further away from their origin, but which are actually tracing minor revolutions within a vicious circle whence they cannot escape. The incessant revolt of the Romantic artist may be a sign of creative vigour, but it indubitably points to a curtailment of the rich resources with which society can succour

[1] Robert de la Vaissière, *Romantiques du XXe siècle.* (*Les Nouvelles littéraires*, April 13, 1927.)

the individual. The lava of Individualism may become fertile soil for the myriad fantasies of subjective flora; it can supply nothing solid enough to construct a strong monument of objective art. Dionysos may dance in the jungle of its fecundity, but no temple will be raised for the worship of the calmer god.

We have only to listen to the observations made by each new generation of nineteenth-century artists on the work of their predecessors, and *vice versâ*, to be assured of the instability of the Romantic ideal. The most formidable adversaries of the Romanticists, it has been said, were not the Classics, but certain of the Romantics themselves, only too eager to withdraw from an affair which had started badly. Chateaubriand, for instance, never frankly allied himself to the new school. By 1836 his reserve had become almost open hostility. In the course of his *Essai sur la Littérature anglaise* he insinuates what might be called a complete criticism in miniature of the Romantic programme and practice. Thus, for the stage, where a mistaken imitation of Shakespeare is working mischief: 'La liberté qu'on se donne de tout dire et de tout représenter, le fracas de la

scène, la multitude des personnages, imposent, mais ont au fond peu de valeur; ce sont liberté et jeux d'enfants. . . . Cet amour du laid qui nous a saisis, cette horreur de l'idéal. . . .' And he proceeds to denounce, as a depravation of the intelligence, the excesses of picturesque realism in drama and the novel. 'Arrière donc' he cries 'cette école *animalisée* et *matérialisée*. . . .' He regards as unfruitful the attempts to invent a new versification or to freshen and enlarge the poetic vocabulary. Few, indeed, of the 'conquests' made by the men of 1830 appear other than retrograde steps, signs of a decay in taste which permits impotence to masquerade as talent. Of still more interest to our theme is the sense this Essay shows of the brevity of Romantic reputations and the accelerated supercession of modern literary generations: 'Ceux qui s'appeloient la *jeunesse* en 1830, où sont-ils? Voici venir des grands hommes de 1835, qui regardent ces vieux de 1830 comme des gens de mérite dans leur temps, mais aujourd'hui usés, passés, dépassés. Les maillots arriveront bientôt dans les bras de leur nourrice: ils riront des octogénaires de seize ans, de ces dix mille poëtes, de ces cinquante mille

prosateurs, lesquels se couvrent maintenant de gloire et de mélancolie dans les coins et recoins de la France.'

Sainte-Beuve hardly exaggerated when he referred to the lack of love shown by Chateaubriand to his literary offspring. But this was not the only source of trouble for earnest Romanticists in the year 1836. Not only does their revered progenitor deny them; their most brilliant cadet turns and molests their flanks with a shaft of irony. Without adopting the view that Alfred de Musset's romanticism was a mere accident of youth, an attack of scarlet fever, I imagine that Nisard was not wrong when he said: 'Alfred de Musset, aussi original que ses deux aînés, est plus dans la tradition classique, qui est l'originalité même de la France.' Having outdone his picturesque contemporaries in passionate experiment and elaborate pose, he could jest at their studied faithfulness to the romantic rôle, flicking their idol, the moon, which his ruthless fancy perceived dotting the i of a jaundiced steeple, and mocking their mannerisms in the delicious *Lettres de Depuis et Cotonet*, which deepened the breach with, among other offences, the devastating distinc-

tion that the chief difference between classic and romantic lay in the latter's predilection for the adjective. Yet, from the standpoint of his complacent elders, Musset remained a petulant, irresponsible child of genius. His attitude had its sting, but this could be ignored in the soothing caresses of the hour. His sallies were not permitted to affect the main course of production.

From within Romanticism itself, with the unobservant approval of the masters, something more dangerously recalcitrant was in preparation. Who could have predicted that *le bon Théo*, after leaving Rioult's studio to lead the attack on the Night of *Hernani*, would soon have chased passion out of poetry by inaugurating a type of literary art in which enamels and cameos should have precedence over soul and sentiment? Gautier was not, of course, 'anti-romantic'. He simply gave an original turn to a rich but narrow vein present in Romanticism from the first. His achievement justifies itself as a brilliant, polished facet of romantic pictorialism; but the theory based upon it has revolted every true Romanticist from Hugo to Verhaeren. Even Baudelaire, whose worship of Gautier

is sumptuously recorded in the dedication of the *Fleurs du Mal*, had, half a decade earlier, deplored the effects of his doctrine in a criticism of the *École païenne*: 'Congédier la passion et la raison, c'est tuer la littérature. Renier les efforts de la société précédente, chrétienne et philosophique, c'est se suicider, c'est refuser la force et les moyens de perfectionnement. S'environner exclusivement des séductions de l'art physique, c'est créer de grandes chances de perdition.'

To-day Gautier's reputation as an artist, after having survived more successfully than that of most of his contemporaries, is suffering partial eclipse. For M. Gide he is 'l'artisan le plus sec, le moins musicien, le moins méditatif que notre littérature ait produit'. For Marcel Proust the 'parfait magicien ès lettres françaises' was a third-rate poet.

It is with Leconte de Lisle and the Parnassians, and especially with Flaubert, that appears the first systematic revolt against the Romanticism of 1830, which the preface to the *Poèmes antiques* defines as 'un art de seconde main, hybride et incohérent', or, more bitterly still, as 'une comédie bruyante jouée au profit d'une autolâtrie d'emprunt'. In opposition

to this: 'Nous sommes une génération savante. . . .' And the author of the poems flatters himself on 'l'impersonnalité et la neutralité de ces études'. Superb is his contempt for Lamartine's imitators—'la horde cruelle et inexorable des élégiaques échappés de la barque d'Elvire, l'école des noyés sous les larmes'. And, if these are not enough to point an attitude, there is that proud, vindictive sonnet, *Les Montreurs*:

> Je ne te vendrai pas mon ivresse ou mon mal,
> Je ne livrerai pas ma vie à tes huées,
> Je ne danserai pas sur ton tréteau banal
> Avec tes histrions et tes prostituées.

Nothing could seem more final than this deliberate reaction from egoism and effusion in the direction of an almost classical sobriety and reserve. Yet two generations have scarcely passed before a movement as violent and determined has deserted the standards fixed so powerfully by Leconte de Lisle, and turned the tables on his entire view of art. The defection of the Decadents, the Symbolist revolt are familiar facts in recent literary history. One example will suffice. Thirty years after the *Poèmes antiques*, the Belgian Parnassians can accuse Émile Ver-

haeren, a deserter from their company, of having attacked the deceased 'Pontiff' in an obituary notice, 'avec une inintelligence et une hargne contre lesquelles nous nous sommes cabrés'. And of the two attitudes it is Verhaeren's which is characteristic of a generation that witnessed the passing of Leconte de Lisle with far more relief than ours has beheld the decline of his great contemporary's domination. For now Flaubert, in Alain's phrase, 'Flaubert descend dans les limbes'. And with him Maupassant. . . . One is tempted to quote the line which is turned so frequently to-day against the celebrities of yesterday:

O soleils descendus derrière l'horizon!

The critical writings of Baudelaire are sprinkled with lively judgments which show a marked personal divergence from the position of his immediate predecessors. He disapproves of Lamartine and of Musset because, as artists, they lack will-power and are insufficiently masters of their inspiration. He is particularly severe on Musset, whom he accuses of invoking heaven and hell in his *table d'hôte* adventures, of pouring forth muddy torrents of grammatical and prosodical errors,

and of being altogether incapable of the 'grind' necessary to transmute a passing fancy into a work of art. His indictment of a mediocre painter of Romantic tendencies reveals a certain conformity to the critical standards of the Parnassians, beyond whom, however, as an artist, he progressed far. 'Voilà' he says, confronted by the works of Boulenger 'les dernières ruines de l'ancien romantique—voilà ce que c'est de venir dans un temps où il est reçu de croire que l'inspiration suffit et remplace le reste;—voilà l'abîme où mène la course désordonnée de Mazeppa.' And, as if the point in the attack is not clear enough, he adds: 'C'est M. Victor Hugo qui a perdu M. Boulenger.'

The Master's radical defect he hits off in a remarkable phrase: 'un grand poëte scriptural qui a l'œil fermé à la spiritualité'. Baudelaire's insistence on the spirituality of art helped to prepare for Symbolism, a movement whose ideal was never better defined than in the answer he gave to the question: What, in the modern conception, is pure art?—'C'est créer une magie suggestive contenant à la fois l'objet et le sujet, le monde extérieur à l'artiste et l'artiste lui-même.'

Here, in germ, is another new sect, another schism from the Romantic spirit, which a surviving Symbolist has castigated in harsh terms: 'Ce détestable esprit, que notre génération n'a pas encore bien filtré, empoisonne parfois l'intelligence, alors que le tempérament même lui est hostile.'[1]

As the century proceeds, the duration of literary schools diminishes. Romanticism had flourished for twenty-five to thirty years. Symbolism lasted from ten to fifteen. As early as 1891, five years after he had heralded in the Symbolist movement with his *Figaro* manifesto, Jean Moréas founded the *École romane*, in direct opposition to the radical anti-classicism of the régime he had helped to establish. Demonstrations of reaction succeeded almost annually, until, in 1900, M. Romain Roland could look back on Symbolism as a spell of literary malady, preceding the promise of a return to health. By that year the disintegration of the School had become apparent in the multiplication of minor poetic sects. The word 'school' loses all significance, save as a means of protecting some diminutive or ephemeral coterie, may be an isolated indi-

[1] Robert de Souza: *Où nous en sommes*, p. 53.

vidual, from the risk of being identified with the larger, dissolving body.

To-day Symbolism survives only perhaps in the mind of M. Robert de Souza, while the spirit he detests, so far from having been 'filtered off', thrives to the annoyance of its critic. Indeed, it is a veritable chameleon, prolonging its life by constantly changing colour. Having shown how readily it can do this, I now propose to catch it in the act of swallowing its tail, a feat it seems to find as convenient to perform as the other.

So far I have been concerned to show how insecure was the reign and succession of Romanticism in France, even in the years of its triumph. My examples have been taken, not from hostile critics (that would have been too facile a method), but out of the mouths of creators who started within the pale. And it would not be difficult to multiply them so as to prove—I think conclusively—that the strong literary movement, whose full consciousness dates from the third decade of the last century, has introduced a period of uncertainty, of shifting ideals, of perpetual revolts and recantations, of chronic *revirements de goût*, which

ends in the violent oppositions and the intellectual crisis of to-day.

Has Romanticism proved as uncongenial to the French literary genius as Parliament has so far proved inadaptable to the requirements of French government?

Such a question many Frenchmen are anxiously asking themselves, in one form or another. The answer is complicated by a fact without reference to which this survey would be not only too rapid, but seriously misleading and incomplete. It has shown something of the internecine warfare that has raged between the Romantic generations and their forbears or successors. The result may be a picture of Anarchy; it is not a proof of Anti-romanticism. These rebels have a tradition after all—what M. Maurras calls the *nearest* tradition, so near them in fact that often they cannot distinguish it. 'Une tradition juste' he says 'est examinée avant d'être acceptée. Mais l'esprit de révolte refuse même de connaître ce qu'il subit par sa faiblesse.'[1] The strange thing is, that many of the greatest rebels have either believed themselves from the first to be more genuinely romantic than

[1] Ch. Maurras: *Prologue d'un Essai sur la Critique.*

their predecessors, or have mildly admitted in the long run that they are good Romantics after all!

That Baudelaire, in answering the question as to what is the modern notion of pure art, is defining his own view of Romanticism, and not proposing a new theory of poetry, appears from another remark of his, to which he actually refers the reader for his description of Romanticism: 'Qui dit romantisme dit art moderne, c'est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l'infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts.' What, after all, Baudelaire attacked was simply 'le rococo du romantisme, le plus insupportable de tous sans contredit'.

Flaubert, after a life spent in struggling like a Saint George of letters with the dragon of Romanticism, admits, in his correspondence, the *vieux romantique* in his make-up. But perhaps the most striking instance of this *virevolte* (to borrow just the term for the kind of schism and surrender we are considering) is the case of Émile Zola. In the hey-day of Naturalism he could write: 'Il a fallu notre manie de lyrisme, notre maladie romantique, pour que le xixe siècle ait mesuré le génie d'un homme à la quantité de sottises et de

folies qu'il a mises en circulation dans les cerveaux de ses contemporains.' Later on, he recants with: 'Eh bien oui, je suis un romantique. Nous avons tous sucé ça à seize ans.' Zola is outdone only by the extreme left wing of to-day's revolt. The Surréalistes bow at the feet of Hugo, 'quand il n'est pas bête', Alphonse Rabbe, Philotée O'Neddy and Pétrus Borel. 'Dire que j'ai cru en Pétrus!' sighed Gautier at the end of his life. Nowadays it would be Borel who could sigh at Gautier's expense. The curve of eccentricity has come full circle. The unprecedented poetic vocabulary of the *avant-garde* of the moment, that of the Surréalistes, is, in the opinion of a contemporary, 'un XIXième siècle empaillé'. To revert to metaphor, the chameleon swallows its tail. Nothing is left for it now but to turn into a Neo-classic!

Insecurity of reputation may, after all, have been no more characteristic of the century of Romanticism than of any other period, equal in productivity. But what is curious and noteworthy is that the century which has been the most prolific in literary estimates, and far more preoccupied than any with perfecting

an art, and even a science, of literary criticism, should now appear, from a certain angle, to have been perhaps the most uncritical of centuries. Romanticism had to break down the criticism of judgment to live at all, and to substitute for it the criticism of appreciation, which descended rapidly into impressionism —a new and delightful kind of creation, but surely not a sound critical method. The recent critic can of course be censorious (as any artist can be), but the shifting standpoints and changing standards, which are all he has to depend upon, undermine the possibilities of a stable critical attitude. Which of the following judgments is right? Goethe's estimate of Walter Scott as a great mind, unequalled anywhere and worthy of comparison with Shakespeare, or Croce's estimate of him as not an artist, but an industrial producer worthy of comparison with the author of *Self Help*? More than a century divides the two verdicts. In that time, how many reputations have been wafted to the skies, then buried five fathoms deep, to reappear, like Vigny's *Bouteille à la mer*, bearing its damp, defaced, but still readable record to the shores of Immortality!

VII

A CRITIC OF CONTEMPORARY FRANCE

One of the most characteristic elements in the intellectual Reaction which has of recent years been gathering force in France, is the political movement that centres in M. Charles Maurras and the group and organ called *L'Action française*. The movement derives a double interest from the personality of its leader and from the increasing prominence of his group in the public life of the times.[1] To us such claims as these might seem casual and remote enough, were it not that the *Action française* constitutes one of the most resolute nuclei of that 'realistic' opposition which was but recently the official attitude of France to the foreign policy of Britain. Its representatives were more than once called the 'Diehards' of M. Poincaré's Chamber. And though their losses at subsequent polls have been a notorious

[1] This essay was written before the breach with Rome.

disappointment to them, there is no reason for supposing that they are henceforth suppressed as a positive force in French politics; while, for all their hostility to us, a fairly detached observer may find no lack of interest, and something even of importance, in a movement that springs from what is doubtless the most logically fascinating, the most intransigent and perhaps the most fantastic, theoretical system that has led any of our contemporaries into action.

We may of course take sides at the outset with what is still the vast majority of thinking people in France, and differ absolutely from the conclusions to which M. Maurras finds himself driven. But this decision need not involve us in denying that his able exposition of Neo-Royalism contains criticism and reflections, sown with a lavish hand, which no one genuinely interested, either in political theory or in the more general trend of contemporary thought, can afford completely to ignore. On life and letters, as well as in politics, M. Maurras has things to say which, startling and provocative as they may appear, are never superficial and rarely altogether unsound. Whatever be the value of his contribution to political theory

and action, one cannot, I think, insist too strongly on the power and cogency of much of his destructive criticism, pursued with a sort of pragmatical vigilance, as if impelled by the maxim that advises a constant testing of the tree by its fruit. And he is not content to stop there; his uncompromising attitude enables him to strike at the root of much contemporary rottenness without sparing the axe. His peculiar force comes from the fact that, being a son of old Provence, consciously steeped in the classical tradition and claiming the authority of that doctrine and descent with every fibre of his being, Charles Maurras interrogates our 'romantic' civilization from a standpoint which, though anything but detached, is yet curiously external and even alien to the conditions on which he concentrates so violently. This romantic type of civilization, with its fatal weaknesses and ramifying flaws, he finds at its worst around him. And it was the spectacle of the deterioration of his own land which claimed the author of the *Chemin de Paradis* from the prospect of a front rank among men of letters, for a place of eminence among political thinkers in France to-day.

In his book on Charles Péguy, M. Daniel Halévy has effectively distinguished the mind of Maurras as that of a tragic Mediterranean whose concepts are clear-cut forms terminated by death. He has no sense of compromise, gives no quarter, fears no risk, treats all who differ from him with a trenchant disdain, an irony of cold disparagement—*cette âpreté déplaisante*, of which one of them complained—and justifies his method as a quest for clarity and truth.

The tendency of his Southern genius is to identify all that is good in Occidental civilization with the life and ideals of the Latin races, and at the same time to feel that the treasures of the *monde latin* lie open to the predatory instincts of the barbarian North—or of an even more formidable enemy within the gates. Much of the hard definiteness of his convictions, his desperate assurance, his harsh vindictiveness come from a disposition to visualize the present condition of his country as a drift to perdition. 'Every morning' he says 'when I open the papers, a dash of spleen rises to my lips as I am reminded of the "great moral distress that reigns in France".' 'We know too well' he observes, in one of those sum-

maries which characterize his manner 'what from 1815 to our days has been the progress of the malady. The results are before our eyes. Our State lacks strength, our citizens, isolated from their traditions, are at the mercy of the Administration, in the first place, and then of every other solitary group, like the Protestants, the Free-masons, and the Jews.'

Politique d'abord! is the watchword of the movement, and the national evils against which it concentrates are mainly administrative. Chief of these are the political system, the electoral system, and social and religious evils resulting from the other two, which together 'swamp' the State. For as Anatole France said in a phrase which Maurras quotes: '*Nous n'avons plus d'Etat, nous n'avons que des administrations.*' Yet more fundamental than all this is a complete disagreement with the theory of Liberalism derived from an alien political ideal, and with the principles of Democracy as worked out in post-revolutionary France.

The world began to go wrong with the Reformation, stigmatized in the *Politique religieuse* as the most complete set-back that the human intelligence has known. In France its effect has been anarchical. Protestantism,

Deism and Free Thought have been the inveterate critics and censors of Catholicism and of France. The identification of Catholicism with the cause of France is characteristic. 'We consider religious affairs as political affairs' says Maurras. 'Politically, a French patriot knows no other religious interest than that of Catholicism.' And one of the bases of the *Ligue d'Action française* is that adherents should bind themselves to combat religious influences which are hostile to traditional Catholicism. Faith in the political utility of the latter covers individual discrepancies in matters of dogma. Differing as to the truth, they tend to meet on the ground of utility. Divergencies of speculation subsist, but in practice they agree as to the benefits of Catholicism, both for the nation and for civilization and humanity.

Protestants and Liberals, with their common basis of free thought, are the butt of Maurras' epigrammatic malice. Free thought in philosophy or religion he defines as the desire to think vaguely, and a free thinker as '*un homme dont la pensée demande à vagabonder, à flotter*'.

It appears paradoxical (though perhaps it is natural) that an ideologue whose mentality is

to the last degree logical and absolute should condemn, as the chief vice of the liberal in thought and action, his absolute logic and love of pure ideas. A passage from the *Politique religieuse* throws a curious light not only on this contradiction, but also on the mental attitude—so difficult for the liberal minded to appreciate—which Maurras shared with other French nationalists over the case of Dreyfus:

'The infallible method of upsetting anyone about to embark on political action is to evoke inconsequently the pure ethical concept at the moment when he should be studying the relation and combination of facts. That, moreover, is why the insidious revolutionary mentality never fails to introduce the ethical concept precisely at that point, where there is no call for ethics. Ethical considerations are based on the wills of individuals: now society does not proceed from a contract of wills, but from a fact of nature. . . . That is how Vaugeois was once led to declare: "We are not people for whom ethical considerations count." ("*Nous ne sommes pas des gens moraux.*")'

It is doubtless temperamental in Maurras to look at the liberal régime from a purely

theoretical standpoint, without taking into account the practical modifications wrought by compromise and experience in even the most rigid of political theories. Every sincere liberal he conceives as exposed to such dilemmas as these: '*Ta liberté n'est pas la mienne.*' '*Pas de liberté contre la liberté.*' With the result that liberalism in politics means civil war, while in religion it means schism. ('*Qui dit libéralisme politique dit guerre civile, et libéralisme religieux, déchirement religieux.*') But do such clear-cut oppositions constantly harass the minds of liberals? And are 'liberal' countries the most liable to civil and religious strife? To the first of these questions Maurras would reply, that if liberals do not face the logical issue of their position, it is because they are free, that is *vague*, thinkers. In answer to the second, he would point to the history of nineteenth-century France.

The democratic ideal he regards as a foreign importation, under the ægis of which cosmopolitanism has flourished to the detriment of the nation as a whole. Here, in the denunciation of the Republic as 'Protestant and Jewish', we find a train of thought which cuts across our own traditions since the Reformation.

'The Jew' says Maurras 'has become an agent of revolution. The Protestant proceeds directly from the Jew. Monotheism, "prophetism", anarchy—such is the mental filiation. The *Vicaire savoyard* is a protestant deist'. Maurras has no faith in the 'open Bible'. 'An individual mind, placed without intermediary before the Gospels alone, can quite naturally extract from them moral anarchy.' Here he is quoting from a contemporary, but he goes on to denounce the futile effort to remedy the disorders of our time by invoking what he calls the 'bizarre, romantic, Saint-Simonian Jesus of 1840'. 'I know little of this person' he adds 'and I like him not. I know no other Jesus than Him of our Catholic tradition, the sovereign Jupiter, in Dante's words, who was for us crucified on earth.' All the ideas for which his party stands have been preserved and perfected by Catholicism; and with a characteristic touch of intransigence, Maurras admits that outside the Catholic pale, there exists no Christian sect which can satisfy and assure him on questions of politics, art, morals and nationalism. 'I do not desire for my compatriots' he says in the *Dilemme de Marc Sangnier* 'the intellectual destiny of the Ger-

man or of the Englishman, whose entire culture, from his language to his poetry, has for three centuries been infested with degrading Hebraisms.' *Je suis Romain*! he reiterates, and, for him, to be Roman is to be human.

From the neo-royalist standpoint, democracy in practice is a lie. What has existed in France, since the fatal Declaration of the Rights of Man, is a democratic state of mind which has been a nest of grossest errors. And this mental state itself proceeds from a group of institutions which date from the Constitution of the year 8. These 'murderous' institutions, as M. Paul Bourget has called them, have been at work for a century weakening and undermining the family, the association, the commune, the province, damaging all that supports and fortifies the individual, all that is adverse to shutting the citizen up in his meagre personal right. Every weakness in the life of France to-day has its source in one or other of these institutions. Thence comes the domination of the Jews (*l'Etat juif*); thence the power of the resident aliens (*métèques*); thence the hegemony of the protestant community (*l'Etat Monod*). The autochthonous nobility having been suppressed, a foreign

oligarchy has taken its place; and its power can only be destroyed by replacing it with another nobility, issuing from the vitals of the nation. It is not that the number, all told, of these non-national elements is proportionately formidable, but that in the administrative life of the Republic, they constitute an élite. Nor is it intended, in the Royalist plan, to evict them as 'undesirable aliens': they are to be subordinated to a new national unity which will not destroy but *distribute* things and people according to the places for which they are suited in the hierarchy of the State. It comes as a relief, amid so much dogmatism, to find the admission that mutual tolerance is after all the *modus vivendi* for civilized communities!

Damaged by the effect of unsound institutions, social relationships have reacted as best they could against democratic equality. For it would be ridiculous to say that relations between the classes are democratic. Any attentive observer can see that class distinctions are accentuated in France from day to day. Democracy is but a venomous word represented by a political system contrary to nature.

The argument works round in a circle—*ce système politique: voilà l'ennemi.* Of this inimical system the Republic is the most visible result; but its roots are in the democratic ideal, and while that is spared, the Republic will remain and the strength of France droop and decay. M. Bourget has said that in the Royalist cause alone lies salvation, precisely because it implies the complete contrary of democracy, which is evil and death. Maurras' way of putting it is still more pointed. 'The mad Illuminists of the Terror used to say: Fraternity or death! Political science presents a dilemma somewhat different, but certain. It says to the people of the world: Inequality or decadence, inequality or anarchy, inequality or death.'

Another feature of Democracy to which the neo-royalists are furiously opposed is what Jules Lemaître called the 'essential maleficence of the electoral system', and here their criticism boasts of having no intellectual timidity. Parliamentarianism, government by an Assembly elected by universal suffrage in Heaven knows what conditions, seems to them the most unpractical, the most insane of régimes, because an Assembly thus elected is of neces-

sity the least capable of all to represent, with any degree of precision, the interests and wishes of the nation; in the end it leads to the oppression of a country by a faction. That no Republic has ever been governed, or can ever be governed, except by an oligarchy, is one of their axioms.

They have plenty of evidence to show that this system has not been a success in France. From ten to thirty months is about as long as any ministry can hope to remain in power. In England, it is calculated, there were thirty-three ministries from 1783 to 1895; in France, as many as thirty-five between 1870 and 1895! What industry, it is asked, would not be ruined if its personnel was changed so often? No minister has the time to master the services he is called upon to direct. And this unstable ministerial direction is divided against itself in the maddest fashion. No unity of views exists among members of the same ministry, nor even in the mind of any single minister. He has, on the one hand, his political friends to gratify, on the other, his adversaries to appease. Parliamentary manœuvres completely dominate his general policy. As most of the ministers are drawn from the corrupt

(*honteuse*) class who thrive on the budget, and have no existence apart from their electoral supporters, the resources of the nation are put to the pillage. Futile expenses which originate in the system, augment from day to day, and revenues are reduced from the same cause. The defence, industry and commerce of the nation are all sacrificed to the petty interests of the ballot-makers (*fabricants de scrutin*). If docks are laid, roads opened, railways built, it is for them. The general interest has but a miserable share in all such undertakings. And this invariably is the result of confiding the government of a country to the class of people who are at once the most numerous, the least enlightened and the most needy. For democracy governs by an accretion or coalition of little private interests, not to be identified with the general good. Powerless in matters of public welfare, the régime, even when it makes a show of strength, squanders its fiscal resources and its machinery of police on establishing its nominees, thereby consolidating the anarchy that reigns with them. Through this wastage, and also for want of competent and continuous direction, commerce diminishes and industry declines.

It is idle to talk of a foreign policy. Maurras sets the words of Anatole France, '. . . *nous n'en avons pas, de politique extérieure, et nous ne pouvons pas en avoir*', on the title-page of his book, *Kiel et Tanger*, which was published in 1910. Since then France may seem to have cut a figure in European domination. But Maurras knows that home conditions are too insecure to permit of effective action abroad.

'It is a general truth' he wrote in 1910 'that a foreign policy is forbidden to our republican State. It is another that the French nation cannot do without manœuvring in foreign affairs. From these two principles, it results that republican France, as long as she remains both republican and French, whatever may be the talents or the intentions of the personnel that directs her, will remain condemned to manœuvres that are awkward, enervating and more than dangerous for the integrity of the country and the independence of the inhabitants. The end of this state of things is dismemberment.'

The volume from which this is taken abounds in examples of a characteristic distrust of our

country. From it one would think that for decades before the war, England had been as grave a menance to France as was Germany. The contemporary British tone to France is represented by such injunctions as: *Vous ferez notre bon plaisir, ou nous prendrons votre Empire colonial* (*Kiel et Tanger*, p. 133). Here are some more *aperçus* and (we hope) aspersions on the national character. *Elle est restée pirate:*—England is accused of having thrown Japan at Russia in order to free herself of her enemy in the East, and so remain the unique resource of France in Europe (p. 104). The Dreyfus agitation was imagined and subsidized by England as a retort to the foreign policy of the conservative Republic of the time (p. 121); and in several places England is ironically admired for having so far deserted her own ideal and precedent of constitutional government as to leave foreign affairs in the astute and capable hands of Edward VII!

Before 1910, Maurras' view was that the power of the King had increased, is increasing and (for England's good) ought *not* to be diminished. Doubtless he has since had occasion to revise his opinion about the place held by the King of England in directing the

foreign policy of the nation. But since the War, he is more firm than ever in his distrust of '*la féroce amie insulaire*', and especially in his abhorrence of what he calls the '*tutelle anglaise*'. Nothing in the book is more striking than his conception of English Liberalism.

'Aristocratic, traditional, profoundly adapted to government, by the constitution of property, by the way her navy is recruited, by her general system of morals, her cruel and pure conception of justice, her penitentiary and fiscal régime; as anti-democratic as it is possible to be; devoted for two centuries to the religion of the righteousness of the State; Royalist moreover and resolutely faithful to her dynasty; unknown and closed to the rest of the world, yet developing, penetrating and tyrannizing in every part of it, contemporary England, the England that is strong, not the preaching, bible-crazy England of the seventeenth century (which may reappear in the twentieth, but with the certainty of compromising and spoiling all that made her prosperous and powerful), this England must be judged about as Liberal as Carthage of old or modern Venice. She is the country of

Liberty in one sense only: in so far as the admiration and the pastiche of her most inimitable institutions have served to bring about numerous revolutions and riots on the continent. Such has been the very English rôle of "English" ideas. A rôle useful to England which, in the splendid isolation she owes to nature, has been indebted to this policy for a profound peace. These ideas have caused, in particular, the debasement of France, but as they have made the fortunes of the French Liberal party, and of the Republicans, the latter have always been favourably inclined towards England.'

Meanwhile, having attempted to adapt Liberalism to the exigencies of native logic, his own country presents a poor spectacle from the angle of foreign affairs. Since 1789 a Republic, an Empire, three Kingdoms, a second Republic developing into a new Empire and followed by a third Republic, have successively governed France. During these years, just over a century and a quarter in all, the national territory has been invaded five times —three under the Empire, twice under the Republic, never under the Kings. This, it is

admitted, may be pure coincidence; but five invasions in the five quarters of a century since the Declaration of the Rights of Man, are hardly a recommendation for the security of the *nouveau régime*. Here, as elsewhere, the line of criticism suggests the remedy. The first necessity, and indeed the first axiom of politics, is to assure the prosperity of the State. 'What is it' the neo-royalists are fond of asking with Le Play 'that serves the prosperity and the subsistence of a given social group?' Good sense and truth, according to them, demand a hereditary chief, specially charged with the general and permanent interests of the country (order within; protection without), governing with the aid and council of a certain number of competent men, each according to his capacity (agriculture, industry, commerce, political economy, finance, etc.), and sent as delegates to the central power by the provincial assemblies. Having studied present evils and, as they claim, having attached them to their true causes, which are the political institutions proceeding from the Revolution and the Empire, the neo-royalists have arrived at this question, which they address to the people of France: 'Is the institution of a

hereditary monarchy, traditional, anti-parliamentary and decentralized, conducive to the public good or not?' Given the desire to preserve France, and placing above everything else this will for national salvation, they are driven to conclude that Monarchy is a necessity, the detached examination of the situation having made it clear to them that a French Renaissance is only possible on that condition. And conversely, the very difficulty of such a Restoration proves to them the difficulty of a renaissance in the national life of France. The *Action française* has this double programme. Each of its members has for several years deliberately and consistently striven to make Royalists.

A dynasty re-established in the cradle of Revolution—is such a thing within the bounds of practical politics? The French of the nineteenth century, it is argued, are not like the Romans in the time of Brutus: they have no hatred of kings. Nor do they nourish against royalty the historical passions and hereditary hatreds of the old Republican Party. The superstitions of 1789 have vanished. In *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*, Anatole France has defined the political mentality of a large

proportion of the Parisian bourgeoisie as republicans who will have nothing to do with the Republic, *but who are republicans all the same*. Maurras is aware that the majority of his countrymen are not yet Royalists, even in intention. But for him the problem is not to make them Royalists: it is to institute the Monarchy first. Once that is a *fait accompli* it will be welcomed, applauded by all. But how is this to be done? As every other government since the world began has been initiated: —*by force*. Here the logic of the argument is worth repeating in its catechizing formula:

'What is to be done?
Found a Monarchy.
How?
By force.
Where is the force to come from?
From union.
What is to unite us?
Political truth.
What is political truth?
The Monarchy.'

As for the programme of the future government, it is best given in the words in which a French barrister, exiled for the cause, replied to

Maurras' *Enquête sur la Monarchie* (1900–9). M. André Buffet, 'the most authoritative of all the lieutenants of the king', laid the foundation of a monarchical constitution on these three bases:

Hereditary power, upon the strength and duration of which depend the strength and duration of the nation.

Destruction of the Parliamentary System, as incompatible with the liberty and responsibility of the head of the State.

Decentralization, territorial, administrative, professional, moral and religious.

To the revolutionary idea of Liberty, which destroys both State and citizen, political realism opposes the conception of the true liberties of the nation, and its exponents realize that they must react *jusqu'à la santé*. The restoration of former liberties to the 'associations', the reconstitution of the provinces, the autonomy of the university, the suppression of equal partition of inheritances, the reformation of powerful patrimonies in industry and land tenure, with autonomy for the guilds and confessionals—such is the lesson which the neo-royalists draw from the past; such, they think, is what the present lacks and what the future demands.

Clearly visible in this programme is what Maurras calls his obstinate federalism. A judicious augmentation of the rôle of the provinces would, he thinks, relieve Paris, to a reasonable extent, of the twofold tutelage she is forced to exercise over towns and regions perfectly capable of working out their own destiny. Such federation, he adds, would in no wise hamper fidelity to the '*roi de Paris*'. With these foundations well and truly laid, all things are possible. The instruments necessary for an active European policy are at hand; and the new king will pursue the eternal foreign policy of his ancestors: the prevention of universal Monarchy and of the excessive increase of foreign coalitions.

So far I have discussed the subject as if it were an eventuality of imminent probability —a habit one falls into after reading neo-royalist literature. All they write is stamped with a confidence which surprises the foreign reader, until he gets used to it. To the majority of Frenchmen this tone is mere 'bluff'. English newspapers, when they refer to the party seem to regard it either as a theme for *tête-à-tête* between old generals and aristocratic dowagers in the Boulevard St.

Germain, or as a butt for the communists. It is often overlooked that the *Action française* stands for a group with a history, a doctrine and a programme—a group which has the support of a steadily growing and determined body of adherents.

It would be folly to predict that their ideas are ever likely to dominate French thought. But it is evident that the movement is prominently characteristic of a general tendency towards the Tradition—a reaction, if you will, but a reaction *pour mieux sauter*, which has been growing in France for decades and has been shared by other European countries since the War.

In 1899 Maurice Barrès wrote: 'Il n'y a aucune possibilité de la restauration de la chose publique sans une doctrine.' In order to supply this need, the *Action française* tried for the first time to define its direction, being further stimulated by two events, the Dreyfus case and the affair of the Congregations. The organ of the group grew out of a bi-monthly founded in June, 1899, by Henri Vaugeois, Captain and Villebois-Mareuil. It is now a daily newspaper with a circulation of about 40,000 and a character of its own. The

double sheet on which it is printed gives little news, its main features being the 'leader' in the vehement and often virulent italics of M. Léon Daudet and the firmly worded columns in which M. Charles Maurras blends vigilant commentary on events with constant recapitulation of the Doctrine.

The conversion of Maurras, Lemaître and Paul Bourget to the Royalist cause and the connivance of the late Maurice Barrès show how the movement has appealed to some of the most eminent men of letters in contemporary France. In the *Enquête sur la Monarchie*, the breviary of the group, issued as a questionnaire, the replies to which constitute an imposing volume, are to be found opinions of all types of mind, illustrating the filiation of beliefs and ideas which connect the party with such 'forerunners' as Bonald and Le Maistre, Auguste Comte, Le Play, Sainte-Beuve, Balzac, Taine and Renan. For it is claimed that few of the *têtes fortes* of the nineteenth century who thought deeply about the destinies of France, have been satisfied with the results or prospects of the *nouveau régime*. It was the force of their opinion which sealed the conversion to

Maurras' doctrine of the eminent critic, Jules Lemaître.

'By their lessons and from personal experience' he wrote in 1903 'I recognized that universal suffrage, democracy, government by majority, is really an absurdity, and that a parliamentary republic ends, of necessity and mechanically, by delivering a nation over to the worst element it contains. The one conquest of the Revolution has been civil equality which would have come of itself; all other gains are disasters.' 'The more I reflect' he added later 'the more does Maurras' campaign seem to have the chances of success. The doctrine of the *Action française* is winning adherents among the studious youth, the youth of the Universities, who have had enough of vague democratic anarchy.'

That was written in 1908. Early in 1914 it was, I remember, a growing scandal in Republican households that on Sunday mornings, Royalist literature was being sold by ardent young men on the steps of the Catholic churches of Paris. To-day the cause has supporters in every rank of French society, with organized groups of adherents and study circles

in all parts of the country. Among the working classes it counts a large number of '*camelots du roi*', who will be ready, when the moment comes (if ever it does), to act as bodyguard to the new Monarch.

VIII

EPILOGUE

Most of what precedes represents the gleanings and cogitations of one who may claim to have been a leisurely observer of the literary currents and cross-currents in France during the year 1927, generally accepted as the centenary of French Romanticism. Since then the discussion has certainly abated in fury, though none of the great protagonists have forsaken their positions. With equal certainty their ideas may be said to be still in the air. A lively stimulus to the continuity of the debate has been lost in M. Paul Souday, who left the scene suddenly in July, 1929. M. André Thérive, his successor at *Le Temps*, who has recently confessed that he was a keen anti-romantic fifteen years ago, now looks back on that phase, without regret, but not without the irony of those who, like MM. Bremond and Seillière, regard it as a flush of ultra-romanticism. On the other hand, it is impossible

to imagine any shadow of turning in the attitude of M. Maurras. And M. Pierre Lasserre, who confesses in the preface to a new volume of essays, *Faust en France*, that his mind has undergone transformation, denies that it has changed. He hopes he has progressed, but there has been no Damascus Vision along his path.

To the influence of Neo-classicism the main trend of contemporary creation seems to me as indifferent as ever, though signs of desiderated response are apparent to certain perspicuous, or it may be optimistic, observers. Yet critical opinion, if it cannot now be said to be dominated by, or even prominently concerned with, the Neo-classics, has to count with them still. In France it is becoming a little 'dated' to be rigidly anti-romantic, just as in this country it has passed out of the fashion to be intransigently anti-Victorian. The reaction in both cases had been excessive. But things are not as if it had never been. M. Thérive can write in such a way as to bring back one's youthful feelings for the orientalized *mal du siècle* of the Parnassians. But it is impossible to believe that Leconte de Lisle's followers will ever regain their haughty pre-eminence,

after the radical criticisms of Maurras, now collected in *Barbarie et Poésie*.

In print, a number of interesting asides have been made, within the last twelve or twenty months, which bear on the principal subject of this book. But only one important contribution has appeared, affecting its main positions. This it does in a positive sense, furnishing a rich and useful provision of documents in support and illustration of the Neo-classical standpoint. I refer to the numerous articles and passages collected by M. Pierre Constans under the title of *Un Débat sur le Romantisme* (Flammarion, 1929). The re-publication of this debate—reference to which has already been made in *The Case for the Defence*—with important articles on Jean Moréas and appendices giving a complete summary of Maurras' views on Romanticism, makes a volume which, for interest and value to students of this subject, can only be compared with M. Lasserre's *Romantisme français*. A perusal of it would correct some of the limitations from which this present work must suffer, through attempting to give a general introduction to a heterogeneous movement, instead of confining itself, for instance, to the

critical views and consequences of the *École romane*.

Can one, in the light of this newly gathered material, attempt some answer to the question: What of the future? In which direction lies the promise of good fruit and how far has it begun to form?

Here is the Neo-classic ideal, defined by M. de la Tailhède: '*Faire passer dans une forme, même consacrée par l'usage, une émotion neuve et personnelle, cela constitue le miracle.*' A group of senior and youthful poets are diligently attempting to effect this ideal. MM. Maurras and Tristan Derême lead a column which is closed by the contributors to a new review, called significantly *Latinité*. Here, as well as the feeling, the forms of the past are dutifully, if not rigorously, respected.

Yet classical aspiration can inspire quite the opposite result, and attempt to clothe itself in the fashion of the moment. The *Nouvelle Revue française* for June, 1929, quotes from a poem by M. André Suarez:

'Tout l'art est dans la nudité,
Simple enfin jusqu'à la perfection du vide;
La suprême élégance est faite ainsi de rien . . .'

The practical problem of the moment is, I should say, to bridge the gap between the ideal classicism, everywhere in the air, and the pullulating achievements and abortions of ultra-romantic fecundity.

Raymond de La Tailhède expressed the view, ten years ago, that Jean Moréas, while advising the study of the classics, had conciliated the classic with the romantic, or rather with the best in Romanticism. He then drew a distinction between Romanticism verbal and ideal, '*lequel, au contraire du verbal, se confond avec la poésie même*'. Poetry, he concluded, is revolution. This is only half the truth, Maurras replied. Order must be imposed on disorder. To equate poetry and revolution is to define Romanticism. One of the deepest convictions of Maurras, it need scarcely be recalled, is that Romanticism is disorder, chaos, and negation. The interpretation which he and Lasserre gave to Jean Moréas' famous and almost fatal words—*Il n'y a pas de classique et de romantique . . . c'est des bêtises*—is that the dying poet meant simply to say, there is only good art—and bad.

This conclusion closes the door with a rather self-conscious bang on all the attempts

of Romanticism to escape from itself by changing into something different. Yet it is just upon the possibilities of such a transformation that the majority of critics and creators, outside the school of Maurras, are concentrating—concentrating with the attention of naturalists, bowed over the premonitory wrigglings of some exceptionally curious and rare chrysalis.

In the *Nouvelle Revue française* for January, 1929, M. Ramon Fernandez deals with the problem in a personal and suggestive manner. The centenary of Romanticism, he says, has seen the *esprit classique* celebrated as fervently as its lyrical adversary. That year seems to have furnished the occasion for defining the principal of a classical renaissance, along lines which differ from those followed by the Neo-classics. The latter are (in the tense of the article, *were*) traditionalists, anxious to reproduce the forms as well as the spirit of the past. The new champions, on the contrary, wish to give form to the modern world, in its present manifestations. The harmonious unity which they seek must be a *summa*, an integration, not a substitution.

The time-honoured, wearisome antithesis

must be superseded, even if the 'classic' idea of classicism should come out of the debate considerably modified. No such antithesis is to be found in the history of ideas, but instead, a natural alternation of two connected movements, recurring in a vital rhythm. '*Le classique vivant est le dernier terme d'une croissance romantique, non point sa négation mais plutôt sa réforme et son couronnement.*' And the turning-point of the growth, the pivot of the change, is the desire that is felt at a particular moment for the introduction of *judgment* into experience—*d'ordonner sa vie au jugement.* This is not an intellectual trick, but a vital necessity. '*Ce sont les forces de l'être, dans leur poussée, dans leur tendance à l'achèvement, qui font une obligation à l'homme de se compléter par l'intelligence.*'

The 'order of growth' is thus: Romanticism —Judgment—Classicism. And the judgment thus introduced is personal—that passed by an individual upon his own development. In this sense Dante, Montaigne, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Molière are classics. In each case, the conquest of the judgment appears as the end of spiritual growth. The English novel of the second half of the

nineteenth century is in the hands of many of its representatives—George Eliot, Meredith, Hardy—a classical production. Similarly, *tous les grands comiques sont des classiques.* An excellent instance of a classical development is found in the physical science of the last century.

The classic is thus multiform, but it is not common, because it is the crown and completion, at once normal and rare, of experience in all domains. M. Fernandez deplores the tendency to limit the notion of classicism to the Italo-French classicism of the seventeenth century. True classicism is above all vital, actively engaged in transforming, through the alembic of the judgment, the materials of the present, however romantic in their opaque, resistent vitality. For the condition of a healthy, living classicism is always, or nearly always, a romantic movement. The great weakness of the Neo-classics comes from the fact that they imagine they can *feel* only what has already been *comprehended.*

A similar standpoint underlies these lines of Guillaume Apollinaire, which most descriptions of the contemporary literature in France seem to find room for:

'Soyez indulgents quand vous nous comparez
A ceux qui furent la perfection de l'ordre,
Nous qui quêtons partout l'aventure,
Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemis,
Nous voulons vous donner de vastes et d'étranges domaines
Où le mystère en fleurs s'offre à qui veut le cueillir.
Il y a là des feux nouveaux de couleurs jamais vues,
Mille phantasmes impondérables,
Auxquels il faut donner de la réalité.
Nous voulons explorer la beauté, contrée énorme où tout se tait.
Il y a aussi le temps qu'on peut chasser et faire revenir.
Pitié pour nous qui combattons toujours aux frontières
De l'illimité et de l'avenir,
Pitié pour nos erreurs, pitié pour nos péchés.'[1]

These lines may be taken as an instance of how artists themselves envisage a problem which the critics may perhaps be accused of attempting to settle over their heads. An interview I was privileged to have recently

[1] *Les Ecrits nouveaux*, December, 1920.

with M. Jacques Maritain, whose championship of Neo-thomism allies itself with the keenest interest in painters and writers of the *avant-garde*, placed the subject of my inquiries in a new light by revealing the premonitions of what might be called an *emergent* classicism, preceding directly out of the most extreme developments of the present. Neither theoretical nor traditional, neither a reaction nor a contradiction, this is as yet a potentiality rather than a fact. My interlocutor himself seemed far from certain whether the buds and blossoms would endure to bear substantial fruit.

M. Maritain finds a general tendency (to which he would not attach lasting value) towards a kind, or kinds, of classicism, appearing simultaneously in the various fields of art, music and literature. Among its originators he would put Picasso, whose work, like (in another sphere) the *Socrate* of Erik Satie and the latest productions of Stravinsky, have influenced writers as well as painters and musicians.[1]

[1] This vivid, exhilarating, even a little breathless conversation was punctuated with references to the work of his friend, the painter Savarini, whose cubistic-classic evolution was delicately illustrated from originals and copies hung about the charming room at Meudon.

Stravinsky is a good example of an artist, who, beginning as a romantic becomes classic through the almost mathematical technique of his recent works. With him, contrast Maritain's own master, Léon Bloy, whom he described as remaining romantic in form, while developing a classicism *de fond*.

This is the reverse of what is happening to-day. M. Maritain finds more classicism of form than of spirit among those of his contemporaries to whom he is specially drawn. Here his distinctions were particularly interesting.

The writers of whom he was thinking—MM. Jean Cocteau and Max Jacob would, I think, be good examples—have a classicism of *craft*, which they have reached not theoretically but instinctively, by pushing through the last extremes of Romanticism. '*Classicisme d'instinct, de contour*,' he called it, consisting in '*un effort vers une certaine forme*'. They have carried the eccentricities of Rimbaud beyond the incoherence of the Surréalistes, with whom they have definitely broken. It is the difference—in words coined for the occasion—between a '*mystère noir*' and a '*mystère blanc*'.

No deliberate cultivation of the Tradition here. Most of our contemporaries are too ignorant to be accused of that. Not, of course, those mentioned above. The taste of Cocteau for Sophocles is apparent. But he has nothing of the systematic traditionalism of Maurras. *Copier au trait* is Cocteau's word to distinguish the ideal method from the imitative.

The outcome of M. Maritain's survey was uncertain, if not somewhat pessimistic. He seemed to fear that the promise of a new classicism, which he had found in a group of writers around him, was threatening to give out, and he recognized the instability of hopes based on craft rather than on spirit. '*Il y a quelquechose de pourri là.*' The matter is corrupt. Nor does the neo-classicism of Maurras inspire him with greater confidence. Maurras' influence, he said, is exerted on the public and not upon writers.

In the last resort it is all a question of spirit. Spiritual and moral values are necessary—at least in the *ambiance*—before we can hope for a true classicism.

M. Maritain passed me on to his friend, M. Charles Du Bos, author of *Approximations*,

critic of Byron and André Gide, who threw fresh light on the situation from a distinctly broad and independent standpoint. M. Du Bos received me in his flat at Versailles with a touch of British hospitality. He began by saying that he regarded all questions from a larger basis than that of a purely French outlook, being himself of English parentage on one side and a life-long student of the literatures and mentalities of England and Germany. French Romanticism, he said, speaking our language perfectly, marked a great verbal development, but could show 'no genuine spiritual *Inhalt*.' This makes it an easy victim to such a line of attack as that developed by Lasserre and Maurras.

M. Lasserre's *Romantisme français* he qualified as 'a most brilliant misrepresentation'. The system of thought underlying it was 'a conglomerate of misapprehensions', a national reaction, using literary concepts, and influencing only those who had nothing to say.

In so far as M. Du Bos is interested in the question of classicism and romanticism, he is sympathetic to the way it is regarded by such

men as Gide, Valéry and Fernandez.[1] Not that they agree. M. Gide's classicism is that of the artist, not the man—an 'æsthetic equilibrium'. (This distinction is developed in the *Dialogue*.) M. Paul Valéry's classicism is a 'dehumanized intellectualism'. That of M. Fernandez is a *living* classicism. His effort is to 'reconstitute a vital humanism'. His standpoint is a-moral and non-religious, and as such it fails to interest Gide.

These views had recently been threshed out at a kind of literary retreat, the Décade, which meets annually at the Abbey of Pontigny, near Auxerre. Last summer, under the Presidency of M. Edouard Dujardin, the theme had been Classicism and Romanticism—an interesting proof of the vitality of the debate.

Feeling that my central positions were in danger of being blown to pieces by formidable artillery for which they were hardly prepared, and becoming quite anxious to hear at least one living voice on the side of the traditionalists, I turned finally to M. Henri Massis,

[1] In the recent *Dialogue avec André Gide*, M. Du Bos says that for him the classic-romantic wrangle has no significance. M. Gide alone has made a new contribution to the debate.

who responded to my troubled questionings with reassuring vigour and dash. Under the shadow of St. Germain des Prés, just round the corner from the offices of the *Revue Universelle* which he serves so valiantly, M. Massis maintained the pure doctrine in face of all the evils of the times. Referring to the situation resulting from Maurras' attack on Romanticism and the discussions of 1927, he said that now the debate was closed. There is lassitude on both sides. Maurras' ideas have triumphed. He would not pretend that any important results had yet appeared in the field of literary creation. And he admitted that the contemporary *littérature d'agrément* was individualistic to an extreme degree. But he pointed to poets like Tristan Derême and Henri Charpentier and to the novelist, Georges Bernandos, as men who were keeping the balance, and to the *Muse française* and the new *Latinité* as combined efforts in the right direction. In the last resort he was content to regard Maurras' contribution as a '*protestation*', a '*redressement d'idées*'. No serious attention could be paid to present literary values without taking it into account.

Here this survey should end, through fear

of being forced to choose between conflicting verdicts which increase in number, while, with alarming elasticity, definitions broaden down from precedent to precedent. Yet somewhere, perhaps, in the very multiplicity of views, lies a chance of decent evasion. A courage that trembles before the final cast of the die, may make a show of steadfastness by adopting a throw already made, especially if it fits, as by a stroke of magic, into the sequence of this 'dying fall'.

The series of *Études françaises*, which has already come to my aid with *Pour et Contre le Romantisme*, has produced, during 1929, another *Pour*, under the designation of *Quelques Aspects du Romantisme contemporain* by M. Jean Thomas, and a *Contre* by M. Gonzague Truc, called *Classicisme d'hier et classiques d'aujourd'hui*. It is from the former that I quote, translating and condensing a judicious conclusion to an excellent review of the tendencies of the moment, their precedents and their perils:

'Individualism, torment of the inner life, metaphysical mysticism, if these words exactly define our young literature, another must be

added, and that is Romanticism. Doubtless a romanticism of reflection, intellectual, devoid of verbal excesses, dissatisfied with itself and determined to make no open confession. For despite all efforts at rehabilitation, Romanticism still appears as a sort of monstrous deviation of thought and art. In hatred of its memory, a classical ideal has gradually imposed itself on all minds, impressive enough, it is true, but whose prestige is proportionate to the mystery with which it is enveloped. A confusion has arisen over the sense of the word "classicism", which nowadays contains a promise of immortality. All elevated literature is qualified as classic, every writer of standing aspires to the name.

'Several literary schools have contributed of recent years, and still more during the period which preceded the War, to this apotheosis of classicism. Needless to say, the adepts of M. Maurras and M. Massis attribute the merit for this to themselves, and not without reason. It is nevertheless permissible to wonder whether the somewhat severe programme which they have drawn up, has not contributed to turn aside certain bold minds, impatient to exercise their strength on new

material. One remembers that page in which M. Gide rejects the too restricted limits which the champion of literary nationalism assigns to classical art:

'"*O terrains d'alluvion! terres nouvelles, difficiles et dangereuses, mais fécondes infinimint! C'est de vos plus farouches puissances, et qui n'écouteront d'autre contrainte que celle d'un art souverain, que naîtront, je le sais, les œuvres les plus merveilleuses. Je sais que vous attendez après nous. Que m'importent dès lors les Trianons les plus parés et les plus solennels Versailles! Je ne laisserai pas habiter dans mon cœur plus de regret que d'espérance, et ne retiendrai du passé que l'encouragement au futur.*" '

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Tradition and barbarism.